

***AN
AMERICAN
POILU***



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AN AMERICAN POILU

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INTRODUCTION

THE War, that great refiner's fire, has burned away much of the dross cumbering humankind, and left us face to face with the true metal of a myriad of souls before whose naked purity and selflessness we bow in homage.

They are the youth who followed the Gleam, soldiers who despite the grimness of battle never lost sight of the vision that transformed reality to an ideal; and made of suffering an incident, and of carnage a crusade for humanity.

The accompanying letters sent by an American to his mother and sister seemed too rare a possession to be held in the custody of the few; therefore that the benediction they bring may be shared by others they are being printed. They

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were not designed for publication. Nevertheless, who would ask that they be touched by the editor's pencil?

That an American in his thirties, a nature sensitively attuned and poetic, should for the cause of the right voluntarily cast in his lot with the French *poilu*, and amid the brutalities of war, the tramp of armies, the din of cannon keep his spirit so serene that the star of his purpose is never dimmed, nor the beauty of his surroundings overshadowed, is little short of a miracle. He was not a boy to be fascinated by the glamour of adventure; neither was he of the type to whose imagination a military career appealed. It was only his love for France and for his fellowman that lured him into dedicating his life to the world freedom.

Before our own country entered the struggle, Mr. X., who had often sojourned in Paris and had there many friends, crossed the ocean to give his services as an orderly at the hospital

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at Neuilly; and it was while on this errand of mercy that he formed the friendship with the wounded officer who was so vitally to influence his future. The two men had many tastes in common; both were persons of refinement and a broad culture, and both were endowed with a discriminating love for literature and for art. During the weary weeks of the Captain's convalescence there sprang up between them an affection so tough of fiber that by the time the commander was able to be discharged and return to his troops a plan had been perfected whereby the orderly should accompany him as a member of the French infantry, the condition for enlistment being that the new recruit should remain with that particular regiment for the duration of the war, and not be subject to transfer.

Such a request was unusual, and coming from an American unequipped for army duty was without precedent in the French War Office. In conse-

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quence it was necessary to present the papers personally to the Minister of War, and when they were returned it was with the unique distinction of being the only application of the sort ever received by the French Government from an American citizen.

The letters describing the initiate's training for service are naïve and amusing. Not only was he ignorant of military tactics but although familiar with the French tongue he had no technical knowledge of foreign war terms; in addition he was quite unaccustomed to the vigorous physical exercise his new calling demanded.

Nevertheless the letters he sent back to the mother and sister across seas never emphasize his discomforts, but dwell always on the larger truth of which the actual was but a symbol.

"My dreams are my support," he says. "I transform in order to endure."

One quotation picturing a visit he and the Captain made to the rolling

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kitchens nicely illustrates this quality of mind :

“An interesting sight, these stoves on wheels, with the stew inside. The cook, a huge fork in his dirty hand, stands near by, and the crowd of pathetic poilus gather round with their cups and pails. . . . I watch and I have a vision. Suddenly behind the backs of these dreary, muddy, homesick soldiers I see the treasures of Paris: the Venus de Milo, the rose windows of Notre Dame, the golden galleries of the Louvre, the gardens and avenues — quiet, sunny, leafy — all the splendors seeking safety and finding it behind these little crowding soldiers waiting for their pails of supper. It is visions such as these that keep me going.”

Amid the round of camp life the balance between friendship for his Captain and comradeship with his brothers-in-arms is carefully sustained. All he has he shares with the latter, who in return affectionately dub him “L’Amé-

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rique", a pseudonym he accepts with a full realization of the obligation it entails. A single passage from a letter sent by the Captain of the regiment to the mother of the American Poilu is too sincere a tribute to be omitted:

"I am X.'s friend and together we are sharing in the Great War. I wish simply to assure you that in the difficulties that await him, in the fatigues, and in the midst of danger he will never be alone. It is easy to be devoted and affectionate toward him, for he himself gives so much love and devotion. He is adored by all the men of the company who are sensible of his *camaraderie* and the simplicity he manifests toward each of them. He can count on the devotion of every one, for all know his merits and appreciate the beautiful example of courage that his presence among them gives."

That this faith was not misplaced was amply demonstrated by the events that followed. At the great battle in

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June, 1918, where the Captain was shot down, and later at the famous battle of Soissons-Chateau-Thierry where the intrepid poilu himself was wounded, and from which slaughter only fourteen of the company escaped unscathed, America's son so conducted himself as to bring only honor to the twin Republics to which he owed allegiance.

"I do not know," he muses on the eve of the coming conflict, "how I shall behave in battle; but I know I shall not be afraid."

Nor was he.

His modest delight in his Croix de Guerre and in his second citation is childlike in its wonder.

"I have been cited for the French Cross — I, who was never a soldier!"

It was, as he said, "the climax of the unexpected."

He alludes only sketchily, however, to the martial turmoil seething about him. Instead his letters are redolent with the perfume of gardens, and rich

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with the kaleidoscopic hues of countryside, stream, and woodland. Twilight steals over the valley "with the timidity of a woman begging", and "day is a blue divinity, violets and an unnamed yellow blossom hanging over the trenches."

Of his love for those who are so dear to him who can speak with such eloquence as himself?

Truly war is not without its compensations when through the rifts of the battle's haze we are granted glimpses of a soul like this!

SARA WARE BASSETT.

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS,
January 6, 1919.

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Paris, Saturday, July 21, 1917.

Chérie —

Everything is arranged and within the next seven days I shall enter the most mysterious dream of my life. Yes, it seems a dream — a dream, however, so well buttressed by splendors that if I chance not to come down to breakfast you and mother and H. and all my friends will understand that I have done well. Although my case is unique in the French Infantry, all has been arranged as nicely as possible for me. Captain C. has the government's authority to keep me in his company. In fact I received a letter from the War Minister enlisting me only in Company 247 *au armée*, which is to say that I cannot be put in any other but Captain C.'s. The Commander at St. Malo has even arranged

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that while I'm there (which is only for two weeks) I may eat and sleep inside the caserne. This will be a great help, as naturally at the very first I shall need whatever comfort I can get to aid me to meet the enormous change of life. Fancy me up at five o'clock in the morning, gun in hand. Fancy me drilling all day. How tired I shall be — my back aches at the mere prospect — but how splendid; and as I have written you I am in excellent health — rosy as a youth of eighteen and feel as strong as a lion. Of course the two weeks at St. Malo are nothing; from there I go to a depot located five miles (about) from the actual front. There I put in two months training and after that proceed directly to the trenches. Life in the trenches is for me at present unimaginable, but I shall do my best and at least work to keep serene; serenity is a great quality of a good soldier, so it seems to me. And you and mother must try to be good soldiers — always remembering that the cause is

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worth more than anything that I can possibly give. The move alone justifies your unfailing love for me — and justifies mother's and justifies my love for the right, the strong, the unselfish, the beautiful.

E.

*Dépôt du 47ème Régiment d'Infanterie,
St. Malo, July 27, 1917.*

Dear Mother —

How I wish you could see me. I am a poilu — since yesterday afternoon at four o'clock. I am "dressed up" in a not perfectly fitting blue uniform and a little bonnet stuck over one ear. I look like a youth of twenty-one — I am rosy and chic. My shoes are of greased cow-hide and my legs are bound to the knees with blue puttees. The uniform is a heavenly color and hot as hell and I feel like a happy stranger dropped from the moon. The first opportunity that comes, my picture shall be taken and sent to you.

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I left Paris at seven-thirty o'clock. My last days in town were very exciting. In my somewhat large circle of friends I am become a hero — why, I know not. The *ouvroir* gave me a farewell tea — the ladies were charming — a red, white and blue bouquet was put in my button-hole — speeches were made and I was lavishly kissed. This took place Thursday afternoon. I was enormously touched — so many kind eyes looking at me — so many kind wishes given to me. Friday afternoon at four o'clock I made my final signature and now until the end of the war I'm a French soldier. Nothing but the most serious event can take me away from the job. How wonderful it is to be in the great waves, one with the best of mankind. Could you realize my present happiness you would go about your house singing like a lark.

Well, after the signing in Paris I had twenty-four hours in which to reach my Depot, so I left Paris last night and

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arrived here this morning at eight o'clock. I met the dawn in Normandy. To tell you my sensations of that long ride, sitting up, will be an evening's pleasure at C. F. after the war.

As I've told you, my case is very exceptional and my Captain has arranged everything in his power to aid me and smooth my way. Long before you receive this letter I shall be at the front. You will hear from me regularly. Don't write to me until you get my exact address. Pray for me, love me and know I am completely happy.

E.

St. Malo, July 29, 1917.

Dear Mother —

As you may very well imagine there are amusing moments being a poilu. This morning, for instance, we were taking account of all the luggage I must carry on my back when I leave here August 2nd for "somewhere in France." The uniform and overcoat are

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by no means light, and then listen to the multitude of things I must hang about me — thirty pounds in all. A knapsack stuffed with underclothing, a *musette* stuffed with food, a *bidon* holding wine, a blanket, a tent cloth, a tin cup, a tin dish, a gas mask and a helmet. Also 120 cartridges and a bayonet. A gun of course in my hand.

“Well,” the Captain suddenly asked, “and what will you do if you meet an officer? How will you salute with a gun?”

“Mon Dieu,” I cried, “I haven’t an idea.”

“Remember the streets of Paris are filled with officers and to fail in a salute often means severe punishment.” I found this very funny.

However, to-morrow I’m to have my first training with a gun and if on August 2nd I come across an officer, — as without doubt I shall, — he may think me hugely awkward but he will see my faith is good. Yesterday and to-day I’ve

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been learning the grades of my superiors, which is like a foreign language to me, and my own numbers — in French this is not so easy. Also I'm breaking in my new shoes (a hard job for my tender feet) and my uniform. The strangeness of it all charms and slightly terrifies me.

I cannot tell you how romantic, even thrilling, it is to so suddenly find myself a soldier in this old, gray-walled city. Surely it is the great adventure of my life. And everybody is so willing to aid; that is to say, the soldiers and officers at the Depot. If I can keep well and resist the fatigue of the first month I am sure I shall be a very good soldier and add a richness to all the days left me.

E.

Dépôt du 47ème, St. Malo.

August 1, 1917.

Bien chère Chérie —

Your letter of July 12th, written a few days after my first cable, arrived here last night. On first reading it

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made me unhappy — deeply so — (not regretful for my decision you must understand, but simply unhappy) but on second reading I realized you wrote in confusion, astonishment and perhaps terror, not being naturally *en rapport* sufficiently with my conditions or my plans. Surely it must have been trying to suddenly hear that instead of sailing for home after all these months away I proposed to volunteer for the great adventure. I understand, dear, and I hope and believe that the letters you have since received from me have established your morale. For you as for me it is the opportunity. Whatever the outcome, it is destined to cast a real splendor about us forever and ever — and you and I have always been so eager for a real splendor, isn't it so? Personally I am vastly happy — as I've never been before. I only regret I'm not an ox with the strength of ten and the lives of "Billy" to hurl myself against the Boches. I have heard of

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Louvain and Rheims; I have seen their devastation. I want to be a soldier — in fact I am: a poilu with a number 14914 and a gun and a little tin cup — and a splendid captain. I am no longer an outsider. The law and the right are at my back, and in my heart and ear the order to advance. I cannot fail — or, rather, even failure in this case has its touch of nobility. Do you understand? We are alive — we have become a part of our generation — I have my rôle to play and you have yours. When once you realize the prospect you cannot be other than happy and proud. You will bear the hardships with me and the light will fall on your mourning. I see you proud, intelligent and happy. I do it for you, and when I come sailing up Boston Harbor our joy will be white and solid as marble. You know my pen and that I can only express myself in this way of writing. From my many letters you will get, if you put them together, a pretty good idea of why and

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how I have started out. The influences have been, naturally, enormous, obscure and complex — but now my path is clear, and to know you are happy and courageous will be the sunlight on it.

E.

August 9, 1917.

Chère Mother —

There are so many many things to write you that my poor pen staggers at the labor — and too my time is short. The soldier's life is a busy one, especially when he is getting his training. It is indeed a great adventure for me — like something in a delightful old story-book. It is engrossing, physical, mental, fatiguing. My happiness is intense; a bird (I don't know what kind) is singing in my bones, and whatever may be the outcome I can never regret my decision. Of course my chance here is extraordinary — a piece of the fantastic luck that has followed me all my life. A unique opportunity.

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I left St. Malo five days ago and came to this enchanting little village where my regiment is stationed. The Captain in charge of the Depot (a royal sort of fellow) received me with marked cordiality — for two reasons: first as a friend of Captain C.'s and second as an American volunteer. He at once arranged everything for me in a perfect manner. I eat with the officers — the food is excellent — I'm lodged in a bewilderingly charming house — a large room, airy, comfortable, with a casement window opening upon a veritable Matisse garden. The orderly of my Captain attends to my little needs — cleaning shoes, etc. Each morning from seven until nine I train alone under the special orders of a young adjutant. He is a splendid young fellow lately returned from Verdun. My dear, whenever you hear the word Verdun cross your heart — its story is tremendous — history will write it in gold. After my training I study the *mitrailleuses* with two cap-

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tains. Each morning since my arrival (except Sunday when I played Canfield!) I have assisted in taking apart the *mitrailleuse* — it is a marvelous gun — and thoroughly engrossing. Next week I shall learn to discharge it. Already I've shot off an automatic gun — it was the first time in my life, and Captain C. said my left arm trembled — but I did it and enjoyed it. I hope to become a good shot. Afternoons I march under commands. We dine at seven; how can I tell you of the charm of our meals? A long table set in the huge stone-paved hall of an old house. Seated about it charming officers. Our plates are of tin, so are our cups. We are lighted by candles burning in wine bottles. The conversation is jolly and intelligent. If I wish to ride a horse I may (we are not sitting at the table now). Twice I've been invited to go fishing, but needless to say I'm too tired as yet to use my leisure in sports. Every one has been so nice. Five days has made

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me a little thinner “under the ears” and I’m burned. Write to me twice a week and be content that I’m so happy and have entered into so magnificent a current. I shall remain here until November and then move nearer the front. All day here we get the detonation of the French and Boche cannon. So you see, for all it is so delightful, we are on the warpath.

Devotedly,

E.

August 22, 1917.

Beloved Mother —

It is strange to read of such hot weather at home. Our summer has been autumnal. August 1st at St. Malo was even wintry. I wore a woolen shirt and thick socks — and for all that took a cold, which has long since vanished. Recently our weather has been divine — temperate describes it — just the thing for training and horseback riding, of which I have plenty. The days pass swiftly and happily. Out of bed (or

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rather off of bed — it is on the floor) at five-thirty — training with the gun until ten o'clock — *mitrailleuses* until luncheon — theory of warfare until four — ride across country or a march until five-thirty — dinner — bed at nine. Of course you understand my training is (so far) very special owing to my friendship with Captain C. For a man of thirty-five training has its difficulties. One must begin slowly. I work with all my strength, sweat like an American in August, and find the life very exciting and pleasant.

Never shall I forget my reception in the Depot by the Commandant R. and his officers. It happened I arrived a half hour or so before Captain C. (we came in different carts), and you can imagine the moment might have been very difficult for me — a raw civilian; but no, I was greeted like a friend by every one, and most charming men they were too. Some have since been killed, and I came only three weeks ago! The

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personnel of the Depot changes almost daily — officers returning to the firing line and others coming here for a rest. Yesterday noon arrived a young lieutenant who thrilled me with his account of the last attack near Verdun. He was still deaf from the explosions. You could not sleep if I should tell you all he told me — of the splendor of certain acts — of the heroics of the common soldiers. Captain Pete thought he might receive an order to go at once to the front (after the news of the attack — several officers were killed) and we decided I should go with him, training or no training. Strange, but I've a mad curiosity to know how I should act under a violent bombardment. Fortunately I shall learn that later.

Word came Sunday to Commandant R. to go to the south of Europe on a commission. I was sorry to have him go. He is a most charming man, with a large knowledge of warfare and books. Four of his brothers have been killed since the beginning of the war. Nine

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left his father's house to fight. For his last dinner Captain C. and I made a little fête. An extra bottle of wine and a funny menu which I hurriedly arranged. He was very amused and pleased. When he left all the Depot came to say good-by. He kissed his brother (who is instructing me) and Captain C. and me, saying, "I kiss America." Wasn't it a *beau geste*! I was naturally flattered.

This letter has been interrupted by the *coiffeur* who came to clip my wig, and an hour's ride on "Déloge." The countryside was exquisite in the late afternoon light. We rode through fields and fields of gathered golden wheat. I must stop now and "clear up."

Excuse the vague composition of my letters. I am always in a hurry. Free moments are rare. I think of you constantly and know you are happy knowing I am happy.

Toujours,
E.

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August 24, 1917.

Dear Mother —

How you would have laughed this morning if you had seen your poilu shooting at a target for the first time — and afterwards drilling with seven other soldiers. Heretofore my training has been alone, and, as I say, this was my first attempt with cartridges. Externally I was more serious than was ever any judge, but inwardly amused. I had a strong sensation that you and Emily and H. were sitting in the blue on a comfortable white cloud, grinning down on me. However, I was too busy to look up and wink. On the whole my shooting was successful. Of the eight “old hands” who shot with me, only one did better than your son. I fancy a little training will make me a really decent shot. My “eye” is splendid, is true, but naturally my arms are not solid. The detonation and the “kick” which I had been led to think would be nerve-racking I discovered to be nothing. I

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fired fifty cartridges. Without any doubt if I return from the war I shall become a hunter and we will, each autumn, eat venison and duck fresh from my gun. Isn't it nice to feel my father living in me again!

Well, dear, here we are in September (I write as you read) and your garden is falling to dust. I feel your hot last-summer days and the brown coolness of the house. Almost a year since I fastened my trunks and left home. And it's over a month since I enlisted. Time is a hustling American. By the way, I'm not far from Pershing's army, and next Sunday I'm invited over to hear a concert arranged by my compatriots. *Vive la France, Vive l'Amérique!*

Devotedly,
E.

August, 1917.

Chérie —

Here is a veritable festival of engines of destruction and you would be amazed

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to see me getting an insight into their workings. This morning I left the house at six-thirty, walked eight miles (through enchanting midsummer country) to attend a lesson on the grenade. It was vastly interesting. The ground was arranged exactly like the lines at the front — and a group of soldiers threw five hundred grenades. The noise was formidable but exciting. I notice that the explosion has a distinct effect on the blood. It rouses the circulation and makes one feel like getting right into the thunder. As we were the guests of the Captain of the grenade throwers, we were shown the various and terrible varieties. One impressed me deeply. It is an invention of the Boche, but now used by my France. A grenade to suffocate and burn the enemy. When the harmless little tin box touches the ground it sends out a splendid thunder and a gorgeous rain of blue fire that burns instantly to the bone. As I watched the thing in action I hadn't a

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thought of the horror of being killed by it, but, I thought, would it be possible to launch it even at a Boche? Surely one must feel the vastness of "the Cause" to be equal to the act.

This afternoon I fired the *mitrailleuses* (two models); they work to perfection and respond with an astounding ease. I desire to be a good *mitrailleur* — it requires a mental force and a clear eye — and no especial physical strength. I also got down on my belly and fired the *mitrailleur* gun. This is also delightful and formidable. What a pity I didn't begin my life at West Point!

You cannot imagine how kind every one is to me here. And such splendid men — so intelligent, so jolly and all with a record of bravery behind them. I am very happy and I only regret you are not at hand that I might tell you all about it. Last night we heard a terrific bombardment from Verdun.

Dear sister, the summer is almost gone — your garden, I hope, has repaid

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you for all your labor, and you have flowers in all the rooms. I am often there, I assure you — listen and you will hear me — And what do you read? Each night before going to bed I listen to my Captain reading Walt Whitman. Later, when I am used to the novelty of this life, I shall read Racine to him. The gamut is sufficiently stretched, isn't it? marching, training with a gun, grenades, *mitrailleuses*, Racine and Walt Whitman.

It is raining this twilight and one could easily be homesick — but I'm happy.

Toujours et après,
E.

*412ème d'Infanterie,
Dépôt Divisionnaire.
September 11, 1917.*

Chérie —

The number of my regiment and my *secteur* is changed, as you will notice. The reason of this is interesting, and you will learn it after the war. It is likely

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my *secteur* number will change again soon. Don't be surprised or worried if letters are often very much delayed. And remember always that, without doubt, all letters to and from me are read by the censors, military and civilian.

This is Tuesday, and on Thursday last I wrote you we were awaiting orders to march. The word came Saturday noon and by one o'clock, under a broiling sun, I was one of the thousand men to be seen serpentining out of the weird little village of the villa and Matisse garden. I was loaded like a pack mule, and, for the first four miles, wondered however I should be able to stand the strain. The "Ham Branch" flowed down my back and Niagara fell from my brows. My left shoulder was numb. *Halte! Sac à terre!* The good Captain gives me a drink of tea. I smoke a cigarette. *Sac au dos!* The knapsack swings over the shoulder. We scramble from the grassy edge of the white road and are marching again.

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The second hour is easier — and sweatieer. Our smells, like our songs, mount to the skies. We sing about *La Liberté*, *Le Pays* and the pleasure of sleeping *près de ma Blonde*. “*Oh, près de ma Blonde, qu’il fait bon dormir.*” A corking lilt that the feet follow well. It is an old song — eighteenth century — and is still the favorite of the heirs of the soldiers who fought for the kings.

I am the victim of aches, fatigue, but proud as a veteran as I pass the poor fellows left panting by the way in the shade of a dusty bush. By five o’clock we are all nicely arranged in an enormous train of cars. I am with our officers. We eat dinner en route out of a straw box. Seven o’clock we alight at S—, companies are formed — *sac au dos* — marching again into the vast face of a dramatic, sulphurous sunset. The little town watches us go by. The outlying country is huge and still and lonely. Here and there in the middle of a field, or a step from the road, a soldier’s grave

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— his flag so bloody, bloody red in the strange yellow twilight. I am very tired — the hour is solemn — impressions come fast and rich. A beauty never dreamed by me before comes to me out of the sky — the fields — the black forest masses — my comrades — my load — and the tramp, tramp through the stillness. I think of many things. I think of my father and mother and thank God they made me a man as susceptible as any. I hold it the greatest gift parents can give — and mine gave it me.

We pass through little towns left in ruins by the Boche. We cross a damp meadow and meet the night in a wood — night as black as the Kaiser's future. Difficulties are evidently ahead. We halt half a dozen times in half an hour. It is exhausting. Word finally comes down the lines that we must go over the foot-bridge of a river. We form a single file — we creep — it is terribly tiring. At last the bridge —

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a mere plank only half a yard wide over a deep broad river — a shaky cord to hold by. A thousand men pass over, and I for one, who hate the lowest height, tremble like a fool. I laugh to myself, thinking I might be drowned on my first march.

My fatigue is intense but suffused. I no longer feel my sack or gun. My feet march by themselves. We have another bridge — plank without cord — awful — but I get by, along with my nine hundred and ninety-nine comrades.

I remember we went through a street of lovely lighted windows. I remember the look of two sweet women standing at a door, one holding a lamp, the other bending down and pouring water from a pitcher for crowding poilus. I shall never forget the perfection of that group — never.

All agree it was a hard march. Every one was exhausted, my Captain very much so.

The later and blacker it grew, the louder

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our songs. I noticed that those who had not sung at the start now sang for the others. At ten o'clock (rest for ten minutes) I was flat on my back by the road looking up at a red star and humming "Annie Laurie."

A little before midnight eight hundred and fifty tired men fell asleep in the divine straw of the great barns of S. I shared the Captain's room — weird, dirty room and a weird but clean bed. I was so exhausted physically and so excited mentally I could not sleep. The bed-clothes were heavy as lead.

Day appeared at the funny window. A huge bowl of coffee, a bath, and I was "fit" enough. My first march — the hardest and perhaps the happiest day of my life. A word spoken to aid me by an unseen soldier — the timbre of courageous voices — I shall never forget.

Devotedly,
E.

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412ème Rég't. d'Infanterie,
Dépôt Divisionnaire, Secteur Postal 49.
September 22, 1917.

Chérie —

If the postman has done his duty, you know that I am moved away from the funny little village of the mauve crocuses. (I sent you a crocus, did it arrive?) We were afoot by seven o'clock (all but the Captain who was mounted on a bay horse — he looked very handsome). I suppose the weather was ideal for a long march — cool under a gray sky — but I should have preferred sun and sweat. The lack of gold on the landscape — the low skies — did nothing to lighten the hardness of the road and the accumulating fatigue. No one sang, no one laughed; hour after hour with hardly a word spoken we put the left before the right and covered a goodly number of miles. Perhaps the weather had nothing to do with the depression — perhaps it was the direction of our

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route. At two o'clock we boarded a train. Our orders told us we would arrive at a certain town at ten o'clock, and then a march of ten miles would bring us to our new camp. At eight o'clock it set in to rain hard — no lights allowed on the train. Ten miles in this storm will be a jolly experience, I thought. The train was late; at midnight we were "there." A charming Commander to whom I was presented — he spoke English — entered the coach and told the Captain we were to sleep in the train; good news — everybody content. I wrapped my *capote* about me and tried to sleep — a painful night; at dawn we were in line and en route — a march of fifteen miles through a country absolutely worn out by war — I was tired. A cup of thin wine for breakfast — my feet huge with yellowish mud, my hands superbly dirty — but I was solid and happy. The little poilu by my side was exhausted, but I kept him going by giving him a cigarette from time to

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time. We arrive — and the dream deepens. A village — how can I tell you about it? — a village exhausted — a village like a poor old man who has worked too hard, all wrinkles and bones — a village not destroyed by war, but worn, beaten, consumed by the passing and repassing, day and night, of an army. The road is a skeleton gnawed by the rolling artillery and infinite, infinite feet. The cottages, the trees along the way, are old hags, the very air seems frail — weakened by the constant shock from the cannon. By the meager little river has been built a series of long huts for the wounded — brought daily from the trenches. On the dusty, dusty hillside is a graveyard — monstrous, awful — with huge ditches all ready and waiting for their soldiers. I walked through it crying — it is unimaginable — it is unimaginable.

Bombardments and gas and aeroplane attacks are frequent; we are forbidden to leave the house without a mask. Three times this morning the trumpet

AN AMERICAN POILU

has sounded the approach of aeroplanes. Last night I said to the Captain, "No matter what happens to-night, I shall not leave my bed — I'm dead tired. They can try to blow the place up — but I propose to sleep." Nothing happened, however, but I didn't sleep. The rats made such a hellish racket — a perfect stampede in the refuse heap outside my broken window. I had to get up to see whatever they were doing; a sky fretted with stars repaid me for chilling my feet on the century-old floor. In the north the sudden forked lightnings from the cannon. Isn't it all like a dream? A hot bath, this morning, in the erratic rubber tub made me feel like an ace.

E.

412ème Rég't d'Infanterie,

Dépôt Divisionnaire, Secteur Postal 49.

September 22, 1917.

Chérie —

I am getting very near to the music
- it sounds day and night. Already

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I accept it as one of Nature's own voices, and forget to think that each rumble and bang may be the death of heroes. Most of the men with whom I marched from the village of crocuses left last night — we only arrived at noon — for the first line. I saw them trail away in the green twilight and I felt a little ashamed that I was not with them — and a little jealous also, realizing their opportunities. Poor fellows! they were tired and went away a little sad — after three years of war fancy the need of rest. Their route must have been dreary; this part of the country is almost one continuous graveyard. I slip out of my window. I cross the road. I enter the awful cemetery where the soldiers literally sleep holding hands — their crosses overlap — one bouquet decorates three graves. The disagreeable trench is already made for the others — the others who are marching by — the others who are shaking the little pears from a dusty tree in the miserable meadow opposite

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—the others who are sitting in the cobwebby barns cleaning their guns — the others who are scrubbing clothes in the dirty river — the others who are writing home.

My room would amuse you. As it is the Captain's also it is probably the best in the village — a sort of huge cave, smelling of old cows and old pigs — a fireplace like the black portal of a cathedral — an uneven floor that can never be clean — two solemn and beautiful wardrobes side by side — two beds (mine a charming one of the Empire) — a clock reaching to the rafters — and a chill that sends me out of the window every so often to warm my feet in the sun. I am very happy, Phebe, and feel like Alice in Wonderland.

E.

October 1, 1917.

Dear Mother —

Letters drop in from all my well-beloveds but never a word from you.

AN AMERICAN POILU

What is the matter? I can't understand. Some heartless eddy has doubtlessly ensnared your epistles and they are piling up somewhere for me — at least I hope so.

As I have told you our recent move has brought us nearer the front. An ugly little village nightly serenaded by *les avions* is at present our home. I can't say that I exactly like it, but then I didn't enlist to like it. A night or two ago we had a thunderous old time and the next morning I stepped down the road to take a look at the "remains." Not a pleasant sight. One bomb fell among a charming group of trees; it made a hole as big as a room. Near by I picked up a little yellow bird whose head had been cracked open by the explosion. He was probably sound asleep on the unlucky bough. I inclose a tiny feather I pulled from his wing. I pray it may bring you as near as you will ever come to a bomb — unless it is the kind Paris cooks make of ice

AN AMERICAN POILU

cream. By the way, do you still have ice cream in M.? Send me a freezer full. I am hungry for ice cream — and apple pie. Another month and I have a *permission* of ten days. I can eat ice cream then three times a day.

Devotedly,
E.

October 3, 1917.
Dépôt Divisionnaire.

Dear Mother —

I have been complimented — and I quote it for your amusement — for you know I never dreamed of receiving a compliment for my marching, drilling, handling a gun and all the rest.

This morning the Lieutenant who was commanding the company praised me for my “dash.” He used the English word — fancy! And yesterday a Captain of another company complimented my work. Captain C. turned to him and explained how little training I had had, and the other Captain replied,

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“But he was better than the others this morning.”

It is very amusing and thoroughly enjoyable. Three hours this morning I worked like a trooper in a sham attack. My body is still aching (pleasantly) from the movements. It is great fun.

Where are your letters? My brother soldiers are to celebrate your birthday.

Devotedly,

E.

October 5, 1917.

Dépôt Divisionnaire.

Chérie —

A dark, cloudy, autumn night — nine o'clock. My weird room is lighted by a candle wedged into a wine bottle. I'm alone — the Captain being busy outside. You must have wondered about the Captain. He is a very remarkable man. Externally he is calm, precise, elegant, reserved. Mentally he is active, just, brave and deeply intelligent. His faculties are directed to his soldiers —

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his country — he is unfailing. His devotion to me is complete. Never, for a single moment, has he forgotten “my case” since I enlisted, and this in a life busy from dawn until bedtime — and often after. Last night, for example, he was roused at two o’clock to sign certain orders. As he has told me, he is never tired when he has something to do. If every officer in the French army was of the type of my Captain the French nation would need no allies.

I have told you of his love and insight regarding literary matter. We have had such good half hours reading Walt Whitman and Racine. The latter has become my daily companion. A spare moment and Racine is in my hand. I hope you will read him some day. We will read “*Phèdre*” and “*Athalie*” together when the cruel war is over and Johnny comes marching home again.

At six o’clock in the morning when I tumble out of bed and strap on my armament for the drill — and feel a

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little depressed — I say to the Captain, “*Parlez anglais, Pierre*”, and he recites the words he knows. He speaks them so gently — it is so amusing — that I begin to laugh — my lazy depression vanishes — and I mount the hill in martial spirits. Pray for the Captain, for without him I am lost.

What are you doing this misty night?

Toujours,

E.

Sunday, October 7, 1917.

Dépôt Divisionnaire.

Dear Mother —

A pathetic episode in camp to-day. I wonder if I can tell you about it. The event was really a happy one but the atmosphere about infinitely sad.

The older soldiers, after three years of war, have been released from military duty — sent to the rear to help the cause in other ways — mending roads, etc. Those (a hundred men, perhaps) of our camp left this noon. I went out

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to see them march away, and say good-by to those I chanced to know. They stood up like young soldiers, but they were so thin and shabby and tired. The Captain, with tears in his eyes, said good-by to each one — shaking each one by the hand. In their honor he had put on his best uniform and his decorations — a chic thing to do. “*Gard à vous!*” was the order. They took their best position. “*Arm à la bretelle!*” that is to say, “carry your gun by the strap.” A delicate order, for the *young* soldier *shoulders* his gun when retiring from his captain. So they marched away in the wet and the gray — our old soldiers; only that, but I shall remember it — and my slender Captain dressed up to bid them *au revoir*. Robin (it was Robin who cleaned our shoes) was among them. He was devoted to Pierre and to me (as Pierre’s friend) and, before leaving, he called me to him and gave me his funny old cane.

The simplicity and the serenity of

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the old French poilu is very touching, and you may be certain I omit no chance of showing my appreciation of his destiny.

E.

October 16, 1917.

Chérie —

I had just finished reading your charming letter of September 20th when the Captain came in, crying that a Boche aeroplane had fallen in the fields not far from the village. I had heard a lot of shooting, but we are used to that sort of thing; so I hadn't gone out to see what might be happening and I missed the *chute d'Icare*. But as the horses were waiting for us (we had planned a ride) we jumped into the saddles and galloped over the midday fields to see the victim. A group of soldiers from a neighboring cantonment — a dozen or so Americans — and surely a hundred horsemen were already about the wreck. It was a sorry sight which made everybody happy. Huge black crosses on

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the tail covered with blood. The two occupants horribly mangled. Overhead proudly circled the French machine that had done the good work.

Suddenly bounding over the fields came a golden-red fox. The crowd set up a yell of joy and the hundred horsemen went tearing after the poor animal — and *got* him. Arriving home I found a pretty butterfly resting on your letter. I killed him (just to be *à la mode*) and inclose his corpse to verify my deadly instincts. Probably the long journey between you and me will destroy his charm of purple, lilac, brown and yellow. I was quite indifferent to the Boche and his blood — and to the thought of Gretchen in Bingen on the Rhine — but I confess to feeling a qualm while sticking the pin into the butterfly. It was so pretty of him to select your open letter for his resting place. *Chérie*, we are all savages, or else for a time the world is insane.

Devotedly,
E.

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October 20, 1917.

Chérie —

The fog is over us to-night and is our protection. It is so dense you can't see a yard ahead. The Boche will not be able to find us. The twilight was very lonely — wave after wave of mist came up the valley and settled about the weird houses. There was a moment when the village looked like a gray corpse — killed by some monster who, escaping, had thrown his huge, bloody knife into the sky.

This new moon will bring us bombardment, but for the next ten days at least I'm to be safe in Paris. We leave to-morrow afternoon, arriving in Paris Monday morning before breakfast. What a good time we shall have washing and cleaning up at our leisure! For ten days I shall forget guns and drilling and all the array of war and simply lark it. I anticipate a good time. I shall be a *poilu en permission*. I must do my Christmas shopping —

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what shall your present be? I haven't an idea less modest than a white satin dinner gown or a Russian seal opera cloak. But, *ma Chérie*, these are war times and we mustn't overdress! What shall I buy you? A bag? No? Is your bead one still good-looking? My pen is light-headed to-night. I merely write to say I love you. How many letters have you received from me? I've written you nearly daily for a long time now. But writing is such a consolation to me. For all I'm here and "in it" soul and body, I'm still an outsider. I'm still the one American in the French Infantry. So you see my pen is a kind of wireless telephone which is constantly ringing you up.

E.

November 3, 1917.

Chérie —

I've had the keenest disappointment. I return from my *permission* expecting to find letters from home and there are

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none for me. Not a word to greet me. You see, since I've joined the army I've written to you or mother nearly every day. It has been my greatest pleasure, and somehow this has brought *home* into my outlandish rooms and barracks. You have been beside me almost every hour. In Paris, *en permission*, caught up in a cyclone of good times, I didn't find a moment to write a word. By some mysterious inner connection I thought of you all the time as not being in M. but back there "somewhere in France." A subtle joy invaded me on leaving Paris that I was coming back to find you — and behold, I am here and you are not — nor a letter either. Do you understand? Of course there are steamers filled with your manuscripts sailing toward me. I realize it, but it was a shock not to find at least a word waiting on my table. It was something like arriving at S. Street, after the war, only to discover the house cold — vacant.

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“‘Is there anybody there?’ asked the
traveler

Knocking at the moonlit door.”

Well, the *permission* is over. Its rapidity is baffling and illogical. It doesn't seem possible that ten days could go so swiftly. I didn't have time to turn around. Like a poor gamin who has found a ticket for the theater, I sat for a dizzy hour in the light and splendor and then was run out into mud, rain and blackness. Mud, rain and blackness tells the tale exactly, both as to weather and my morale. To-day has been a nightmare inside and outside. I'm lonely, I'm lost, but, thank God, I've the priceless gift of moods and to-morrow without doubt will find me happy as a dozen larks.

À toi,
E.

November 9, 1917.

Chérie —

There is no use — it remains a dream — the whole *détour*. And to-day it is

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dreamiest. I can make no reality out of it. This November village drenched in rain and mist — zigzag houses half in ruins — these crooked trees — sand-bag roofs of shelters under a camouflage of dead branches — low barracks — camions driving in the mud, their canvas coverings painted like stage drops. At night the skeleton lights signaling over the hills — the whine of shells — the explosions and the echo. Does that sound real, I ask you?

'On the long marches (I love them), at drill or target shooting, I feel somnambulistic. My little dog Tray does not bark. Last July I thought the soldier's life would solidify the earth under my feet, but it has made it more an air cushion than ever. The dream rain falls on the dream roof. Well — I cannot help it. My head, my left side to France if need be and willingly, but my last fancy to whatever wind that blows. The tree to the lumberman but never the birds. They twirl aside, they drift.

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Chérie, do you find my letters vague, unimportant? What do you care to hear from me of the pitiable Russian slump, Nicholas, Rasputin, Kerensky and Co., or of Italy's black eye (tremble for Venice) or the last fall of Gaza? Your papers are filled with Uncle Sam and his army. I send you what is integral of myself. My helmet, my thick shoes are on the warpath. I am over the hills and God knows where. I met a brave soldier who told me he hadn't a sensation when he went over the top. I'm sure I shall have one — that of the uttermost of dreams. Is it a gift — a curse? I don't know. *C'est moi.*

E.

412ème Rég't d'Infanterie,

4ème Compagnie, Secteur 49.

November 12, 1917.

Chérie —

A Boche plane overhead trying to take our picture — our cannon making a hell of a racket shooting at her. They

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come by daylight to make their studies, returning after dark to do the dirty work. I've told you how unpleasant that is.

Chérie, look up the valley — 'tis late afternoon — and admire the amethyst drapery. It floats around the November trees — the sky wanes. "*La nuit est là, comme une femme qui mendie.*" The valley has become my art treasure, my theater, my cinema — it performs hourly. This morning when I got out of my box it was shy and secretive, showing merely the thin tops of the few trees. Later, the white mist crept up its sides and disappeared into the woods. The grass by the stream was green as April. The sun made it shine — now it withdraws in lilac tints and "*la nuit est là, comme une femme qui mendie.*" This lovely line of poetry the Captain brought back from his *permission*; a friend told it to him — he told it to me. We have repeated it a thousand times while thinking and doing

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unpoetical jobs. Haven't you often seen the night come into a room like a woman timidly begging entrance?

We read "things" in the papers and we say — "How dreadful that must have been", but the mind cannot conceive how dreadful a "dreadful thing" is. With my, as yet, little experience I have learned that it isn't the dying or the wounds; it's the live flesh *recoiling* as it goes forward toward the "thing." Do you notice how much I use the word "thing"? It denotes the indescribable — whether it be beautiful or awful — *the thing!*

But I am not writing my letter — I can't seem to get on the track. I took my pen to tell you of my trip to Verdun. Perhaps I'm frightened to begin — it made such a ghoulisn impression — an episode in the dream when one screams and wakes up crying.

We motored, as guests of a Commandant and another Captain. We entered the nightmare in the early afternoon. As

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I wrote H., my ink is too white to convey to you my sensations as I walked through. I felt as though my head were dead and I was looking out of rotten eyes. I felt like an idiot with my mouth hanging open and my tongue lolling out. Nothing I had ever thought or read looked like Verdun. I didn't dream there was so much hate in the world. Street after street of crazy houses, churches, libraries, cafés, palaces, shops, theaters, meat markets: a city in ruin — not cleared away by fire, but standing like a circus of lepers; and so still — not a hint of life, not a ghost left even — nothing but destruction — hollow, toppling, murky. A city knocked senseless by thousands and thousands of blows. A few years since Verdun was one of the loveliest cities of France, the Venice of the North, serenely terraced by the Meuse. Outside the walls we entered the Citadel, a huge city of soldiers a hundred feet underground. I felt I was in the New York subway — vast corridors, vast

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dormitories, vast dining rooms, chapel, theater, etc., etc. The Commandant invited us to drink champagne, and in the electric-lighted bowels of the earth we lifted our glasses *à la Victoire*.

To find the motor we returned through the city; it was no more hideous in the obscurity than an hour earlier. Verdun! — the Boches didn't get it — "*on ne passe pas — on ne passe pas*" — a symbol forever of resistance, of splendor, of the forces that are more ferocious than death. We came home over a road lighted by cannon glare — Verdun.

Toujours, Chérie, toujours,

E.

412ème Rég't d'Infanterie,

4 Compagnie. Secteur 49.

November 17, 1917.

Chérie —

To-day the Captain had an errand among a neighboring troop of Algerians. I went with him. The camp is in a wood. Late afternoon and getting glim-

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mery. I wait in the muddy path. The scene is beautiful. I think of you. An autumn forest — bronzy and garnet, russet, cinnamon, rouge. Standing about a huge can, paring potatoes — a great pile of them on the ground — is a group of Arabs. Others lean against trees (their uniforms are the color of the bark). By the doors of the barracks groups are singing. The trees are very tall and very still. It is chilly. Just that, and the night insinuating — it seems to gather into a picture — an old master — warm shadow, tinge, just felt gold, and the removing touch as though it were precious and unperishable. I saw it. I thought of you. To-night my uniform smells good — as after hanging on a tree for a day. I have something from the November leaf, bough, vista. It puts me back there — under the tall trees — so I write it home to you. Do you think it too slight a pretext? It is quite natural. I'm following a track — a splendid one, but thousands have found

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it fatal, and daily I'm obsessed — as though something inside, in spite of me, were saying good-by — to communicate, to attach myself to you — to home. I would squeeze my heart into your hands, drop by drop. It is the heart, I believe, that remembers. I must tell, tell something. I must make a mark on the wall. So I write.

Devotedly,
E.

November 26, 1917.

Chérie —

The Captain and I have just come in from a tour around the cantonment, inspecting the rolling kitchens. An interesting sight, these stoves on wheels — with the stew inside. The cook, a huge fork in his dirty hands, stands near by and the crowd of pathetic poilus gather around with their cups and pails. When the stove door is opened golden spots break out over everything; even the mud (the mud here is grotesque) shows

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a bright eye. Captain Pete takes a look at the meat, talks of the potatoes and the amount of sugar in the tea. I watch and have a little vision: suddenly, behind the backs of these dreary, muddy, homesick soldiers, I see the treasures of Paris — the Venus from Milo — the rose windows of Notre Dame — the golden galleries of the Louvre — the gardens and avenues, quiet, sunny, leafy — all the splendors seeking safety, and finding it behind these little crowding soldiers waiting for their pail of supper. Chérie, it is visions like this that keep me going.

Well, Pete pronounces all is well and we go out of the shed, and walk up the hill toward the west. It is cold — an unearthly light on the slopes — and a star as big and calm as a cow is tethered in a faint green pasture. The north is black. We stop to admire the cow — rain on our faces — down the hill to the chalet *vert*. Before we arrive our coats are white with snow.

AN AMERICAN POILU

I've stepped out since to see, and
behold the moon on duty! Snow here
is only make-believe.

Good-night,
E.

December 6, 1917.

Chérie —

Last night I wrote you a letter in which I quoted a poem of Walt Whitman (my great friend these days), and I left the book open on my table. This morning (I've nothing to do) my eye falls on the next poem, which is so beautiful and so good to remember these days that I copy it for us both. (You cannot hear and feel the bombardment I hear and feel as I write.)

“How solemn as one by one,
As the ranks returning worn and
sweaty, as the men file by where
I stand,
As the faces the masks appear, as I
glance at the faces studying the
masks

AN AMERICAN POILU

(As I glance upward out of this page
studying you, dear friend who-
ever you are).

How solemn the thought of my whis-
pering soul to each in the ranks,
and to you,

I see behind each mask that wonder, a
kindred soul.

O the bullet could never kill what
you really are, dear friend,

Nor the bayonet stab what you really
are,

The soul ! yourself I see, great as any,
good as the best,

Waiting secure and content, which the
bullet could never kill,

Nor the bayonet stab, O friend."

You must excuse me if I copy poetry
into my letters ; idle moments come,
and shouldering a gun doesn't change
a man ; besides I like the idea of a French
poilu sending back to America the poems
of the Civil War. It touches my faney.
It proves that we do not live by bread
alone.

Devotedly,
E.

AN AMERICAN POILU

December 10, 1917.

Dear Mother —

It is black night here. The church clock is sounding six. A high wind is tearing overhead. The green chalet creaks like a ship at sea. My face is still red and burning from my afternoon on the hill. I've been shooting. You will be amused to hear that I've the hardest work to get anybody to criticize me. Everybody is so nice, so polite. I think the next time I shall shoot wildly into the air like Colonel Cody, just to see if an officer will say, "Come, come, that's not the way to shoot." I think French people have an idea we Americans are born with a rifle in our mouth and a couple of carving knives in our hands, consequently, we can't go wrong before a target. This amuses and disconcerts me very much. To-morrow we are to work with an English machine gun. Eighteen hundred bullets a minute is the record. You can imagine the effect

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a half dozen of these guns would have on a regiment of soldiers. But of course both sides know this, so before advancing their men they try, by cannon, to destroy the machine gun. I've taken apart and put together a Hotchkiss machine gun so many times I could perform the trick in the pitch dark, which, the Captain tells me, is a military asset.

But why do I write all this to you? I don't know unless it is to bring you as close as possible to my weird days. War and weapons are so fantastic.

Devotedly,
E.

December 20, 1917.

Chérie —

Perhaps I'm too cold to tell you of my yesterday, but I'll try. With seven officers I went to Verdun (bitterly cold) to a funeral.

A month ago there came to the Depot a lieutenant — a young man — a nice chap. He only stayed three or four

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days and was called to the front. A week ago at night he and a sergeant were trying to cut a path through the barbed wire six or seven yards away from the Boches, in order that his men, at dawn, might make a *coup de main*. An heroic thing to attempt — and he was shot (the sergeant also) in the hip, the bullet shattering the bone. By a miracle his men got to him and he was brought dying to the hospital “La Glo-rieuse” just near Verdun. Yesterday he was buried. The service was rapid but very impressive.

We enter the impromptu chapel — a room in the rough, overworked hospital — helmet in hand. The chapel is in semi-darkness. Before the childish altar, guarded by three immobile soldiers, lies the box covered by his flag. A little white cushion at the head holds his two decorations — Croix de Guerre, Légion d’Honneur — the latter having been given him ten minutes before he died. The officers — his General (I am beside

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my Captain) — stand back a little. Every five minutes, of course, the windows rattle to a bombardment not far away. The priest comes and, hurriedly, reads the burial service. The solemnity of the box dominates. We follow, heads bare, the wagon to the cemetery. It isn't far. The landscape is white and cold. It is very beautiful. Fifteen thousand little crosses on a hillside. Three or four boxes unburied. Row after row of holes — waiting. The earth turned out this morning is a soft chocolate color. By the grave his Captain tells how he was killed. *Les adieux suprême*. One of the officers — a captain — who came with us weeps like a dear friend. The priest and the officers sprinkle the box with holy water. The *escouade* that marched by the wagon, guns trailing, presents arms.

Coming home, the Captain, who cried, said, — “Ah, Picton was a fine fellow, one could talk Chinese with him.”

Devotedly,
E.

AN AMERICAN POILU

December 24, 1917.

Chérie —

The Captain says — he looks over my shoulder — this is a *triste* picture to send home, but I feel differently. My landscape having been dotted with mounds like this one (covered by the snow they look like birthday cakes), I've come to feel quite happy and friendly about them.

This is Christmas eve and bitterly cold. I've been with two American officers all the afternoon. We talked "weapons" and watched a sham attack. One was a colonel, the other was a captain — perhaps they were frozen (everybody was), perhaps merely stupid. I couldn't decide. Of course the situation is very difficult for the American officer who doesn't speak French. And, as I say, the battlefield was Siberian. Our demonstration was over by four o'clock. We walked down the hill. A fine snow began to fall. Our path, through a wood, down the fields, led us by a group of little graves quite like

AN AMERICAN POILU

the one I've pictured. To-night the thousands of merry soldiers making Christmas under the snow! "Come fast and thick, little snowflakes, muffle from us, who are doomed to live a century, the music of their hilarity; hide from us their ruby goblets, their knowing winks, their friendly nudges."

Later (after dinner) I was interrupted by the appearance of a *petit Adjudant* come to invite the Captain and Monsieur H. to step into the officers' mess room before dinner to drink a toast. We went — it was charming, touching even. Eighteen rosy-faced men gathered around a narrow festive table. A huge turkey was broiling over the fire — it smelt good. Our glasses were lifted to La Belle France. It was decorated and gay and smiling — but, I fancy, not a patch beside the jovial splendors of their comrades, out in the fields, snug under the snow, celebrating Christmas eve.

Devotedly,

E.

AN AMERICAN POILU

December 26, 1917.

Chérie —

In a recent letter you inquire about the *briquet* marked "Verdun", and ask if I bought it there. Chérie, you could no more buy a *briquet* in Verdun than you could buy a fan in a cemetery! You might risk your neck and climb up into a tottering house and pillage a broken mirror or a rain-soaked book — but you couldn't *buy* anything in Verdun. There is no one there to take your money. We wandered through the Bishop's Palace (not a ceiling intact) and took a worthless book from a repulsive heap on the library floor. Verdun is a hell of ruins.

No, the *briquet* is made from a socket of a cartridge, by some clever poilu in an idle moment—in one of the sectors near Verdun. He gave it to an American ambulance driver, who gave it to me.

It's touching and amusing the way soldiers occupy themselves in spare times.

AN AMERICAN POILU

I write letters and, lately, draw pictures for you. I remember seeing a clumsy poilu painfully making his sweetheart's name on a sheet of paper by carefully inserting (it was early September) the yellow petals of some wild flower. He sat in a doorway and worked as though Victory was at stake.

Paris is flooded with "rings" and *briquets* — the distraction of the poilus' empty hours.

Man is a simple, painstaking child; it's the inflated hogs that set him fighting.

Our world is made of snow and moonlight.

Devotedly,
E.

December 30, 1917.

Chérie —

We're ordered South — just where no one as yet knows — but we're breaking camp — our knapsacks are packed — and to-morrow we depart.

AN AMERICAN POILU

Good-by, little valley, you've been a charming comrade. Good-by, poor little ruined village of snowy roofs and twisted apple boughs. Good-by, green chalet. Good-by, miserable stove. Good-by to the sunrises over the wood — to the mammoth star each sundown in the west. While I live I'll remember this village for the valley that ran away from it and the star that hung over it. Doubtlessly Venus will come with us, but I shall always think of her here — gold over the green chalet.

God knows what awaits us south — perhaps a real house — perhaps shops and cafés and a thousand natural charms — perhaps everything quite otherwise — ugly and cold. But I'm not worrying. The uncertainty pleases me. I should think soldiering would, after a year or two, make every poilu a sort of Wandering Jew. I begin to understand the hired trooper of old — the soldier of fortune — who lived to fight and fought for the fun of it — going no

AN AMERICAN POILU

matter where — now east, now west, or north or south, and finally to adventures in hell. (Just like the stay-at-home!) But in those days they didn't have to face the "curtain of fire", the gas, or the aeroplane bombs. Times have changed. War was quite "nice" in the sixteenth century. I fancy my "bit" will be all I care to meet. Here's hoping, Chérie, I do that bit bravely and come home victorious — along with my brothers in khaki.

Happier New Year,
E.

January 3, 1918.

"Somewhere else in France."

Chérie —

I'm just about as uncomfortable as I can be. I wrote you in my last letter we were about to change our cantonment. That letter bore the date of December 30th. We were out of bed the next morning at three o'clock. I felt fresh and gay. The hubbub of

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starting is always exciting. It wasn't cold — the moon, although hidden, suffused a vague light over our world. We drank hot coffee and at five-thirty took to the open road. The station from which we were to embark was fifteen miles away. We reached it a little after nine. I was warm and happy — the slight pain in my legs being nothing to speak of. The station was no station at all — only a bleak track running between a windy field and a windy cemetery. We waited there until four o'clock — a real torture. However, I shall remember a pretty picture or two — a group of soldiers crouching over a tiny blaze of sticks (they had brought them on their backs) and another group loading the warm colored loaves of bread — hundreds of them — into a car. There was a thunder in the gray air from the eleven hundred men stamping their freezing feet. The train pulled away at four o'clock — it was fast growing dark. A perfectly miserable night —

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cold, cold, cold. Everybody suffered. At five o'clock in the morning — New Year's Day — we piled out into the falling snow of our somewhere else in France. We waited and waited and waited (a nice poilu treated me to a cup of coffee). The day came up in a glory of rose and yellow. A charming old city awoke around us — my tired eyes admired in every direction — I felt suddenly glad. The plantain trees in the square seemed enormously tall and unreal. The houses along the river jumbled together, snowy and lovely. Over a wall I saw a garden with marble statues. The steeple bellowed out a jangle of bells. At the ends of all the twisting streets, hills covered with vineyards. At ten o'clock our barrack was found — at half-past ten I was slipping off my luggage in the Captain's room. We are lodged *chez* a wine merchant, in what I should call his "cold room." The bed is superb — God be praised — the stove is a porcelain joke — my

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compliments to the Devil who made it. We lack fuel, and as everybody is busy getting settled there are no exercises, so I'm left to freeze. Something that amazes me very much is the difficulty the poor soldier has in finding a place to live. No one is ready to let him in — and when his Captain forces the situation, it is always *chez les pauvres*. The well-to-do houses will not open their doors — and he is suffering for La Belle France. This is a large, prosperous city, and yet eleven hundred of its countrymen arrive here in the cruel winter dawn and not a single person is on hand to offer a cup of coffee or a warm corner. I cannot understand it — the strange selfishness in the world is awful. We are aching for firewood, yet no one seems to dream of cutting down one of the handsome plantain trees — why not, I wonder? Human life is the cheapest thing in the world.

While writing this letter Boutrais (the Captain's valet and our friend) had

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brought in an armful of wood — the gift of the wine merchant's wife; the stove — it is as formidable as Grant's tomb — is lighted and when it is through heating itself, it will, if any wood is left, heat us. Remembering my comrades in the straw, I'm duly thankful to the wine merchant's wife. Let me recall that the first week in a cantonment is always a difficult time — later, I may be quite happy and comfortable here — and find time and spirit to write you as heretofore. Meanwhile we are in the New Year. What will 1918 bring to us — to you — to me? *La Paix*, I hope — a home-coming and the good old times again. The day after tomorrow makes me thirty-six — what better could I be doing than trying to help my brothers — myself — through this old valley of tears? I'm uncomfortable but I'm happy —

Devotedly,
E.

AN AMERICAN POILU

January 19, 1918.

Chérie —

I'm ready to take a bath with anybody, a horse even, provided the water is hot. It's over three weeks since I saw enough hot water to scrub all over in. I'm tired of rubbing 'round with a face cloth. How dirty I shall be next week! The order is come we are to leave here in thirty-six hours, and march for six days. I shall feel like a side show in a circus doing one-day stands. The world is groaning, but I look forward to the strain with pleasure. The weather is mild, the snow and ice gone, my shoes are thick; what terrors has a six-days' tramp for me? I shall be sorry to leave here. I'm just beginning to discover the beauty of this "somewhere in France." It is indeed a marvelous landscape. In its summer clothes it must be unsurpassable.

A day or two ago Pete and I walked some half dozen miles and I saw valleys

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and wooded hills and vistas I shall never forget. One little hamlet has left a painting on the wall of my memory as though I were the Louvre and it my masterpiece. I would need be a poet to tell you how it lay in the vase of the russet hills. Its houses were pink and lemon, and regarded themselves in a river shaded like a peacock's tail. I forgot I was a fire-breathing soldier and thought myself some traveler in the land of romance. "Oft have I traveled in the lands of gold —" but this corner was wine-color and peacock and lemon and rose.

Devotedly,
E.

January 23, 1918.

Dear Mother —

I begin my letter in the style of our Benjamin Franklin. Never cross a bridge until you come to it — for ninety-nine times out of a hundred when you come to the river the bridge will be stronger

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and less unpleasant than you could have imagined.

Behold your poilu on the second day of our long march, feeling like Buffalo Bill and Jack Johnson rolled into one. We left the gray town of the Château yesterday morning before seven o'clock. It was pitch dark. Over hill and dale, carrying our house on our back, we marched until noon, when we arrived in a weird Emily Brontë sort of a village, lately inhabited by a company of American soldiers.

An hour later the cook produced an excellent hot luncheon, and after eating I was free to go to bed, which I did, sleeping like a judge or the lazy "Beauty" in the fairy tale until purple eve. Awakening, I found I had lost the aches in my legs and shoulders. Pete was shaving — I shaved — and we went up the hill to dinner. The *popote* was in a house as old and solid and forlorn as Wuthering Heights. The rooms vast and in a state of incalculable clutter.

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Little boys and girls seemed to be going to bed in every dark corner. I wasn't surprised at all to encounter Americans there — a young lieutenant and three soldiers. The officer was pleased to see any one from home, especially in a French uniform, and begged me to sit by his stove for an hour after dinner. I did so with pleasure. He is a Yale boy of the "right sort", feeling very lonely so far from New Haven. We talked war and weapons and I felt like a veteran of 1870. At nine o'clock, he lighted me through the Brontë village to my lodging. "The pleasantest evening I've had since being in France," he said.

"Good-night, good luck, Lieutenant S."

I had difficulty pushing open the door, and when I got inside a funny old woman in a nightcap (I could see by the candle) stuck her head out of a bed in the wall and bade me turn the key. The room had a vast fireplace, and from

the rafters hung the huge sides of a red pig. I said "Bon soir" to Madame and her pig, and went up the dangerous stairs to our room — a perfect Brontë chamber — one entire wall of cupboards. I opened some — strange treasure boxes covered in old style colored paper — dried bouquet of mistletoe tied with yellow ribbon — dresses old as the wainscot and not especially good to smell — basques turned outside in, showing any amount of whalebone. The bed was billowy and draped by a chintz canopy. The Captain was asleep. Being on the outside edge, I was first to respond to the four o'clock alarm. We drank bowls of coffee at Wuthering Heights and are on the black road by five-thirty. Pete is on his horse. He gallops ahead. I will make the road with some fifty men sent in advance to prepare the cantonment. I march between an adjutant and a sergeant. We are *en tête* — we are all long-legged and we set a merry pace. Day came over the fields as

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sweetly as a blond child. At eight o'clock we see a church steeple standing up in the farther meadows. Down a splendid hill, singing, and we enter the new village. It is new to us, but the moon has known it for seven hundred years or more. The Captain, who thinks I have a cold, turns up and leads me into a queer house where I buy a bowl of delicious hot milk. Quarters are found for the men, and at nine o'clock the regiment marches in, gun on the shoulder — a chic sight.

This room is made splendid by its fire. There are two high beds — the window is dripping rain. In the adjoining "piece" there's a little pink pig in a tub. He squeals! Napoleon III stands beside a headless Saint on the mantle. The night-tables are so narrow and the pots so wide you can hardly get the latter out or in.

The Sammies left here last week and the village youngsters are wearing their silly hats — the army is to discard the

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sombrero, I'm told. In the ashes, I found letters from Taunton to "Herb." His mother wrote him to be a good boy. Herb had forgotten his little Bible with Wilson's recommendation on the front page.

After luncheon (stewed rabbit) the Commandant, Pete and I inspected the church. It was born in the 11th century. It contains the brilliant and child-like tomb of Saint Florentin, and a series of naïve paintings telling of his awful temptations and how he overcame them. In one picture he is the center of a group of lovely ladies, richly dressed; in the next only the dresses are lovely — the ladies' teeth have become like those in sharks' mouths and their hands are long green claws. Comparing the two paintings, it was evident, as far as Saint Florentin was concerned, the ladies had gone to a great deal of trouble for nothing — you simply can't please some people is the moral, I presume.

Well, dear, the length of this letter

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shows you the first and second days of our long journey haven't exhausted me. To-morrow we rest; as a matter of fact the regiment isn't in training for a sudden marching test (France is tired) so for the start it has been intelligently arranged not to kill us. The last four days are bound to be strenuous; however, as Mr. Franklin says, etc., etc.

My letter stops simply because my pen is weary. Give kisses and love to your world.

Devotedly,
E.

*412ème Rég't d'Infanterie,
4ème Compagnie, Secteur 49.
January 31, 1918.*

Dear Mother —

My last letter told you of the first two days of our long march. When I wrote we were resting for twenty-four hours in the town where the mild ——¹ is buried. Now I will try to take you

¹ Censored.

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along the rest of the route. It is not easy to remember in detail. The week merges into a confusion of charming towns, moonlit roads, changing landscapes, queer lodgings, weird inns and alternating sensations of exhaustion and repose. I recall putting your St. Florentin letter into its envelope and almost immediately after putting myself into bed, where I slept until Pete's little alarm turned us out somewhere in the neighborhood of four o'clock. We had, as is our habit, arranged everything the night before, so, in no time, we were in uniform and waiting on the bridge for the order to march. The morning air was cold and in the valleys clouds of snowy mist. I was glad I had on Margaret's sweater — however, I could have dispensed with it after an hour's marching and singing. We climbed a hill and met the sun on the top. Our journey was eastward, so he stayed on our helmets until nearly noon. (To be exact, I should write faces for helmets.)

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The day was magnificent — like a tenor voice — the fields rolling and larks singing as in April. We marched up and down, on and on, through half a hundred forgotten hamlets. The old dames and the girls smile in the doorways as we go by. In one town was stationed a regiment of Sammies. A company lined up along the main street and whistled a march to our tread. Wilson's soldiers are impressively lanky. I don't believe there's a hip in his whole army. I was amused to be asked by several of my comrades what the Americans meant by whistling at us. "A compliment," I answered; "they didn't whistle at us but for us." In France you only whistle at a man in derision. However, the Sammies whistled so beautifully I fancy the point wasn't lost by the poilus. Every fifty minutes a signal is given. We make a double column facing the road, stack our guns, as you have seen them in pictures, slip off the sack — and we are free for ten minutes to eat, drink, etc., etc. It is

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amazing — the restorative power of ten minutes. Pete always insists I eat something — and has never forgotten (his orderly carries it) to supply me with chicken, eggs, bread, etc.; I carry my own *bidon* of thin wine. At each stopping place, the poilu pulls out his huge round loaf of bread and eats a generous hunk. Often he opens a little can of sardines, or “singe”, as he calls beef. We are quite like a big family of boys — each shares with the other. I’ve never seen a stingy gesture. The poilu is surely touched by divinity. I’ve seen him so, so tired, watched his back stooping gradually forward under the weight of the precious sack — some one starts a song, we all join in and the pace quickens. The poilu is surely touched by divinity. I have heard it in his voice and seen it in his eye.

At noon we crossed a bridge. The river was pure and shallow. The journey is ended for the day. We are in the birthplace of miracles and mystery —

it is ——¹ country. I'm as tired as I've never been before — I feel parched and thin. The town of that day's cantonment had a ——¹ and our bedroom was very like a neglected tomb, *chez* a neglected old crone, who said she was always amiable, and indeed the poor old body was — doing what she could for us in the way of clean sheets, hot water, and early next morning giving us bowls of coffee. I'm sure her coffee pot was a horror, but her act was patriotic and a soldier asks for nothing more. As I say, I was dog tired and believed I should never walk again, except under military orders, but a change of shoes and a good luncheon set me up sufficiently to follow Pete across the meadows (two miles) to take a look at ——.¹ As usual with birthplaces, it was disappointing — both church and house being badly “done over” — but I was vaguely pleased to see the soil of the land that had produced so remarkable a young lady as Miss ——.¹

¹ Censored.

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On the lonely hillside where she is supposed to have seen the ——¹ was tending her sheep when they appeared, a church has been built possessing all the faults of modern religious architecture.

The following day I shall remember for its mountainous roads and our vivid descents into valleys floating with morning colored mists. One had the impression we were about to march into a fairy sea. The tops of the occasional village stood up like gilded wreckage from the foam. Sometimes the ravine was so sheer along the side of our road that I felt pictorial—as though we were a gallant fresco on a high palace wall.

So we reached the next cantonment—not an especially pretty town—but our chamber was a sunny paradise containing two tall beds. Before luncheon we drank port sitting on stools by the enormous fireplace in an ancient inn. To my eye, it composed into a Rem-

¹ Censored.

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brandt picture, rich in tone and old — old and crimson and brown. The women folks were buxom and talkative. Their cheeks, even those of the grandmother, were brilliantly red. The arrival of our regiment had set the slumberous place into a warm activity. Getting into bed that night I encountered a hot stone jug — my hostess had put it there — it made me feel as cosy as a married man. What a good night's sleep!

The fifth day was the hardest one for me. I left an hour before the regiment, with the men sent ahead to prepare the cantonment. We sang in the moonlight. The fields were a lacework of hoar frost. The road often slippery and difficult — but ever the Beauty sailing in the brilliant air — the Beauty that never forsook us — and which led us to the village of white houses under the inspired hill. There I had a bad quarter of an hour; your old demon, “the shake”, assailed me. I trembled and chattered like a miserable ghost. I re-

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covered in a cup of hot milk. Mon Dieu! I was tired. After luncheon, if you will believe it, I climbed "*la colline inspirée*" and saluted the marvelous view — it was Shakespearean.

The next and last day I thought (on getting out of bed) would knock me out — but the week's training carried me through — and I gained the cantonment (it was a long road) in as bright a condition as the best. Here we were to remain for ten days. *Here* is a good-sized city and we are lodged in the lady's chamber. Her bed is all right, but her pictures might easily prevent one from sleeping. The window looks to the square which is gay with officers of all ranks and ages. Yesterday some one was decorated and the band played "Sambre et Meuse." Our regiment is seven miles away. We are with the Commandant, he requesting the Captain's presence and mine also. I have nothing to do but rest and write letters and watch the manners of the town.

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Well, dear, if I write any more to this letter, its envelope will burst en route and bestrew the roaring ocean with my manuscript. Besides, I've performed my stunt — the six days' march is over — and there's nothing left to do but make a sign of love and seal it with my name —

“He that thou knowest thine.”

E.

February 10, 1918.

Chérie —

The air is full of bells and a rose and yellow sunset is on the hill. Day dies deliciously and on its wing I cross home. Don't tell me it is noon with you; call this twilight ours; we are upstairs in the vagueness, talking. You are murmuring something from your favorite Tom Kettle, and I'm telling you of the show I saw the other day. “Jamais Deux sans Trois”, it was named — being the product of certain members of the 1st Regiment of Zouaves. It was a lightning-quick revue of life in the

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trenches, — jolly songs, silly poems and soldiers dressed as ballet girls. You may ask how girls could appear in the trenches. They danced out of the heads of the dreaming poilus. Although I sat with the officers very near the stage, I couldn't discover but what the men made lovely girls; there seemed to be no limit to their girlishness; by that I mean we saw both high and low, their skirts being brief as love and their basques cut for Mary Garden. I've seen some real "stars" who couldn't put forth so pink and plump a front. They were killing. Of course nothing escaped parody; even *les mutilés*, although brought in on stretchers, leaped off of them and waved their bloody bandages and sang like merry mad men. It was all well worked up and infinitely droll. The hall (in a hospital) was packed like a beehive — we who hadn't yet "gone" and those who had come back; these latter, poor boys, grinning at the fun through some laxity, as it

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were, on death's part. But Death himself, I fancy, must be getting rather tired of dying. Anyway, he was a long ways off that afternoon; it was all jingle and nonsense and peals of laughter.

Now, Chérie, I must go back to my "Somewhere in France." This night wind will take me. I leave you by the singing log.

Devotedly,
E.

February 18, 1918.

Chérie —

Don't grow indifferent to inkpots; my greatest pleasures are therein nowadays.

We are having some stinging cold weather which somehow has rudely disappointed me. Of course the same thing happens each year and I should have known it was meant for a joke, but I was fooled; the springlike days of last week merely gave us a look and ran away and hid. Everything is frozen tight to-night. However, I console my-

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self by thinking others were gulled. Madame set out a bed of lettuce plants. Primroses and daisies bloomed by the wall; poor things, I don't know what they did with themselves last night — quietly froze to death, I suppose.

Did I ever tell you of the murder we had in camp? Oh! it happened two months ago. In a café, where every one was more or less "drunk", a man in our company shot two bullets into a friend. Nothing, of course, strange about that, but the man who had the bullets in his belly was so "drunk" he didn't know for a moment that he was shot. He walked(?) to his barrack and rolled into his cot and fell fast asleep. He was found next morning not only dead as dead could be from the bullets but frozen stiff as a poker. And this reminds me of the meat I saw to-day — it was being unloaded from a van and cut with an ax and distributed. I stopped to watch the red sight and one of the butchers told me that the meat had

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come from Chicago in the same cold storage cars in which it had been packed two years ago. It was beautiful looking beef. We are eating some of it to-night. So you see my blood still flows from U.S.A. Long live Uncle Sam!

The Captain and I have been this afternoon to see two officers in a hospital. They were wounded on our *champ de tir* three days ago. A grenade prematurely exploded, knocking out three teeth from the jaw of one officer and completely tearing away the hand from the arm of the other. It was a horrid sight. One can't imagine the suffering. Not the least atom of his hand could be found — blown to air. The poor chap was very unhappy this afternoon; everything was black before him. Curiously enough, he said he could still feel his fingers. The officer who lost three teeth was bandaged to his merry little eyes and wore his "bonnet de police." He looked very funny

E.

AN AMERICAN POILU

March 10, 1918.

Chérie —

I'm a brute. It's your birthday and it's a free Sunday and I should be thinking only of writing you a ream of letters instead of this word to tell what of course you very well know — that March 10th means you and so we love it. Please forgive me for omitting the reams (poetry, news, pictures, etc.). You see, for all I'm thinking of you, I'm also thinking of a story which must be copied into your book.

Yes, "it" has developed into a book — a little book of short stories which will be charmingly titled "Dear Emily." Five stories are already finished (how they will amuse you), and as my time is short, too, they must be put into one book. My knapsack doesn't admit of many stray manuscripts (no matter how good or how bad). It tickles me, the thought of "stories" on my sweating back. Out of my head, off of my back,

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down at your feet. When the collection is complete it shall sail home.

No *permission* as yet — just as well. Paris was bombed last night, and I would far rather die at the front in the confusion and the tumult than in Paris in a café or a bed. When do I go to the actual fighting front? I don't know, but I'm ready to follow any orders.

Has She come to M. yet? She is here — bushes in leaf and flower, and that way of Hers on the fields and in my heart. If I were human I should be homesick but — but —

The lovely river is alive with poilus washing their clothes and their bodies. Their shirts and drawers are stretched wide on the tombstones of the churchyard to dry. I should love to wash my clothes in the river.

I lunched with a colonel yesterday, a charming soldier.

But you are making me forget my story.

Devotedly,

E.

AN AMERICAN POILU

March 16, 1918.

Dear Mother —

I am marched away to another "Somewhere in France." We made the twenty-six miles yesterday by starlight and sunrise. A poetical experience, during which I burned the ends of my two great toes. Arriving, I took off my good shoes and found your perfect socks in a condition resembling mush — tramp, tramp and sweat, sweat. But one soon forgets the toes and only the pursuing beauty remains. What exquisite fields and rivers and towns I have seen at dawn — And too the Spring has come — leaves on the willows and tassels and furry tips. The meadows near by are blue with a little blossom like a star. I inclose one in this letter.

Well, *here* isn't at all attractive, for all the Spring and her blue eyes. *Here* is a vast camp on a windy plateau which to-day's sunshine makes possible, but which a spell of rain would render almost

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deadly. The good Captain and I are lodged in a tiny, tiny box in a long barrack. My bed is three planks. Last night, however, I was thankful for just that, and with all, or nearly all, my clothes on me, slept fairly well. I shall have less in the trenches, but I'm out for the *less* which is, after all, the *more*.

Next week we go for our deferred *permission*. I'm quite ready for it, I assure you. Ten days in Paris and after — I wonder? Be confident that no matter what the "after" brings I shall be content. Only I do hope I won't be taken prisoner; that would be most tiresome. I want to kill and kill and then come home. Doesn't it seem a long time since I went away? But you have been so near me this last year and a half — and always so lovely and kind. I think you are beautiful.

Devotedly,

E.

AN AMERICAN POILU

March 30, 1918.

I'm not sure of my date. It is the Saturday before Easter. Chérie, well, here I am a long, long way from the windy plateau. We took to the road. How bright shone the moon! I was loaded like a pack mule. As we knew not but that we might go directly into battle, I carried everything I might need on my back, which included a good many cartridges, of course, and bread and wine. And so we marched until eight o'clock (how the larks sang when the sun came up, and the river — I mustn't forget how beautiful it looked covered with a golden smoke!). And "there" we halted and stacked our guns and found a funny little café and drank wine and waited and waited.

At eleven o'clock four miles of motor trucks arrived and we piled in, one on top of the other. We rode until ten o'clock the next day. Well, I hope I shall not be asked to repeat that

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experience; it sounds easy enough on paper, but in reality it was very painful. Dust, dust, dust, and not room enough to shift a leg. By nightfall we were four miles of blistered buttocks. The smell of the gasoline made us all sick. Dust — dust — dust — it transformed us into old images thrown on an ash heap. It turned our hair and beards into starched lace. It made us look like fat mummies. It was awful. We rode on through the night. I could not sleep. The others plumped together like powdery dolls. The Doctor sagged on my shoulder, murmuring something about “la belle France resting on the shoulder of Uncle Sam.” I was hot and feverish — great fatigue excites me. The Lieutenant on my other shoulder was shivering with cold. I tried to diffuse some of my warmth in his direction. Pete was hanging forward, dozing and swinging like a pendulum. The dust on his face becoming purple, I awakened him.

At one o'clock we were given two

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hours' rest. The town ahead was being bombarded. Pete and I, nearly cramped to death, got out of the truck and lay down on the plowed field. The moon was brilliant. I slept on the ground for an hour; I can hardly say I rested. At three o'clock we were riding again — on through the dawn and the early day. At ten o'clock we arrived. As in a dream I saw our landscape was hilly and charming. But I thought only of something to eat and a place to sleep. Both were given me and, as I told II., I knew the divinity of food and straw. The dish of hot soup was more precious than the walls of St. Peter's!

I am with the Captain, who is lodged over a bakery. The machine that kneads the dough arouses us at four o'clock — by noon our room is fragrant with the warm smell of new bread.

I have looked over the countryside; it is lovely — disappearing hills of vineyards — red villages — fields blue with spring. I find *le mouton* among the

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violets. How long we shall remain here nobody knows. We may all be fighting in twenty-four hours or we may be living quietly over a bakeshop. The air is charged with the future. The English are retreating, but only for reasons of strategy, I fancy. We await news of the reaction. The thousands and thousands of boys suffering makes the blood curdle. Recently a colonel, who had "done" the battle of Ypres, told me that in one day in that battle the English lost twelve thousand men from seven in the morning until sunset — *but* — Ypres was an English victory! Alas, that the wings of Victory should be colored like the wings of Defeat.

I am glad to read that Muck has been arrested. How absurd for America to give her sons and her dollars and at the same time honor men like Muck! Do not trust a German. The race is depraved. Before the battle of the Marne the Boches rested in this little hamlet for five days and departing took away

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in wagons, brought for the purpose, all the linen from the little homes. Dirty, dirty Germans.

Well, Chérie, make your garden beautiful — put rose bushes around your doors.

Devotedly,
E.

April 4, 1918.

Chérie —

We approach the great event. It may be I shall come back; it may be I shall touch the happy isles and see the great Ulysses; but whatever port I make, no new and unheard-of beauty can ever ask me to forget you — never — never.

Listen — if it is to be this spring, Madame S. will send you the manuscript of “Dear Emily.” Needless to say it is unfinished — merely a sketch of what I could make it — and the loveliest stories are in my head.

The change of late has been enormous for me. I am separated from the Captain. I am with the poilus. Every

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one is kind and I am very happy. Nothing can prevent me from doing my best. I am strong and well, although my feet are blistered and my back tired. The beautiful Captain has done everything in his power to make things easier for me, but — war is war.

My dreams are my support; they transform everything. I bend down like a Greek god and bandage my heels. I decorate my luggage with turquoise and scarlet. I see you and mother like two tall Queens in a story and your years as long and gray as Northern Sagas. I transform in order to endure. Do you understand? And yet I never forget — never — I've a thousand chances for returning, but know I am happy, whatever the issue. I may have time to write you again before the battle — I don't know —

My love —

Your devoted

E.

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April 4, 1918.

My Belored Mother —

So many things to tell you, so many, many things that would make you laugh, but my present conditions do not permit my pen to cut any capers. As I told E., I have left the beautiful Captain and I am living like the least of the poilus. It is very amusing and I am very happy. Something deeper than my soul is singing inside, and if the song doesn't fail me I shall not suffer, whatever befalls me. You would not know me. I hardly know myself. I sleep on a dirty bag of straw — I eat from my half-washed tin dish — I scrub my own soiled clothes. I simply cannot keep myself clean. All I have I carry on my back; how I manage to I don't know. Your dear eyes would fill with tears if I could tell you how my shoulders have ached! But — there is the song — I'm happy.

We are going into battle very soon.

AN AMERICAN POILU

It will probably be the greatest battle in history. I'm glad my feet have almost unconsciously led me into it. Whatever befalls me you will be brave and proud. So many have given so much more! If I return I will entertain you with my stories for the long rest of your life. If I am detained here by some disaster you will think of me as "away" but happy.

For the moment it is quiet in the barrack. The men are outside cleaning the courtyard. It is raining and birds are singing under the eaves. Tomorrow we shall be far from this serenity. Daily we are marching — a huge army — nearer *la musique*. I am a *mitrailleur*. Who knows but what I shall win the war cross? When the world is howling around me, somewhere inside I shall be thinking of you — and I shall be happy. When I look at these men with whom I shall face the fire I know I shall be strong enough to stand by them. They are young and tired and no braver than

AN AMERICAN POILU

they are, and they go forward and I go with them, if not a half a step ahead —

I think of you and it helps to remember you will be brave and proud.

Forever and forever,

E.

April 5, 1918.

Dear Mother —

My gun is shining, my knapsack is in apple-pie order, all my buttons are sewed on tightly, and I'm half clean, — having stripped off by the river and washed myself up and down. After which I scrubbed my one and only towel. All this is to say I'm ready to advance and do and die. We await orders — the intense yet empty minute is to you. I'm sitting on a bundle of straw in the Captain's *abri*. It is four o'clock in the afternoon — a charming day — warm and blue and musical with larks — only the howl of the cannon breaks the serenity of this old battle-field. Ruins and soldier graveyards are

AN AMERICAN POILU

as tranquil as gardens in afternoon. Everything waits.

Well, the change came Easter morning by telephone. The Captain was ordered to join the regiment (as you know we have spent the winter at the Depot), and I was put into the first company of the *mitrailleuses*. So in a hurry we packed up, said good-by with tears in the eyes to our Commandant B., and left the little room over the bakery. The regiment was lodged some miles away. We drove at twilight through enchanting country, and arrived at eight o'clock. I dined with our new Commandant in a handsome old château. It had been occupied by the Boches before the battle of the Marne. Before leaving they had smashed all the tall mirrors in the lovely old rooms.

The next day we did a long march and on reaching the new cantonment I followed my comrades into the barn. You cannot imagine what a change it was for me nor how quickly I became

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wonted to the conditions, or how happy I feel at being one with the common soldier, come good luck or bad. They are charming and pathetic and devoted to me. They are all my friends — that makes the charm of the exhausting conditions. My God! what conditions — and yet, somehow for me, lit by a splendor that falls from some inner vision — some happy vision in me — some gift from you. Well, and so I make my bed on the floor (last night it was on the ground) and I wash in the brook and I carry my house on my back. I dine with my tin dish on a stone or on my knees, and I love it and I'm happy. But if only I survive to tell you about it — what fun! And, dear, if I don't come home how splendid that my feet carried me into the battle for civilization — how splendid to remember your son also helped to hold the banner — the torch.

E.

AN AMERICAN POILU

April 7, 1918.

Chérie —

How amused you would be to see me making my toilet in the river. I thought of you and your love of "modern improvements" this morning at six o'clock, as I walked down through the dew and barbed wire — now and again jumping an old trench — to my *salle de bain*. Although it has certain inconveniences, still, from a decorative point of view, I fancy it rivals the baths of Caracalla. It varies daily. This morning I found it "done up" in silver and lettuce green, the ceiling a pinkish cloud — here and there huge bouquets of aubepine and almond blossoms. The pink sprigs of the latter remind me of Hebrew written on the air. Before rolling up my sleeves I paused to listen to the birds. R. L. S. slipped by in his canoe. I scrubbed and returned to the half awakened *abri* fresh — but not as fresh as a May morn.

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My first night on the ground I slept like Homer — being dog weary — but the nights since have been very difficult for me. My hip bones seem to have a persistent desire to bore down to the bowels of the earth. I lie awake for hours — the awful cannon for entertainment. My comrades are snoring away like locomotives, which tells me sleeping on the ground is a habit. I shall soon acquire it and sleep (perhaps snore) with them.

At six a little poilu with straw sticking in his beard comes in and shouts "*je jus.*" He carries a black canvas pail. It brings the coffee — hot and too sweet — but nevertheless I drink two cups with pleasure. Then I take my towel and soap and go to the river.

To-day it began to rain at eight o'clock — a cold fine rain. We were obliged to spend the morning in the *abri*, sitting on the straw. It is too dark to read or write. I came up after *la soupe* to say *Bon Jour* to Pete, but

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his little hole was empty. I sat down and wrote a letter. You have it in your hand.

E.

April 11, 1918.

Dear Mother —

My head is feeling too light to make a pen walk more than a step to tell you I have arrived (two hours after midnight) in my first trench. The journey to it was a crucifixion — long — exhausting — violent ; however, my back did not crack open and I was not killed. And the trench ? It is a deep ditch filled with yellow glue. We are to spend the nights there. In the dawn, before Fritz can see us, we slip into a little wood near by, and rolled in our blanket sleep on the ground. To-day I slept like a baby, for all the cannon rip and split and sing over my head. They never stop. I awoke and saw the sun falling through little green leaves. The wood is abloom with violets — the birds sing.

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It isn't pleasant to wake up on the ground in one's helmet and wet shoes, yet I'm happy — and hungry (nothing to eat to-day save bread). The cannon never stop on either side — it is hellish — it is indescribable.

Although I cannot, for the present, write, my memory holds every detail and you shall hear my story when I come home.

What were you and E. doing April 10th? It was a frightful time for me.

Devotedly,
E.

In the Trench.
April 12, 1918.

Chérie —

Before trying to get a wink of sleep I send you word. I have watched all night while a demoniacal bombardment went over my head. The stars and I were calm. At daybreak, into the woods — two hours' sleep — and then a shave and off with my shoes to rest

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my feet. Now I will sleep again. Fritz is bombarding, but not with enthusiasm. We hear the shell coming, guess at its trajectory and hide ourselves accordingly. Running back and forth soon gets tiresome, so now I propose to trust in the Lord and sleep.

A day of a blue divinity — violets and a frail, unnamed yellow blossom hang over the trenches. When the trenches are dry they are not so bad, but where we pass our nights the mud is frightful. Strange sensation to pass hour after hour watching in the blackness for the sound of a stirring foe! My wide-open eyes see all sorts of pictures in the shadows. The heavens are marvelous — filled with Chinese dogs and bats, butterflies and horses. I think of the young shepherds in Attica.

Our meal in the darkness is very droll; a chunk of meat is passed from dirty hand to dirty hand. Last night at one o'clock we were all perishing of thirst, so we dared to walk down the

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plain and found a spring and drank. The nectar of Jove could not equal the flavor or freshness of that water.

Forgive my letter — head and hand are tired — and, well — you couldn't imagine my surroundings save the April sunshine, the violets, and my love for you and mother.

Devotedly,
E.

April 18, 1918.

Chérie —

Your letter of March 21st came this morning at six o'clock. I was sound asleep in our hole — with three comrades together. For my pillow my daily loaf of bread, my feet (shoes on) wrapped in my tent cloth. I had been alone in the fantastic field beside the *mitrailleuse* until midnight; one night from six until midnight — the next from midnight until six in the morning. These April nights are cold — and the mud and the rain — and the continuous hell

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of bombardment — the life is unimaginably hard — each of my fingers is a kind of wound. Once in ten days I've washed my face. Oh! I'm dirty. A month since I've had my trousers off. I'm dirty as a poor pig — and hungry. The second day *en ligne* Fritz blew up our three rolling kitchens, so we have eaten little things out of tin boxes. The Captain comes down the *boyau* now and again to see me. It is so dangerous to move. A huge shell fell twenty feet from him the other day *and did not explode*.

This moment I'm sitting in the trench beside the gun, hidden under a camouflage. Three hours' guard each day besides the six at night. Life is become a masterpiece of difficulties — however, this sector is what they call "calm." Fritz is just ahead, hidden in his trench. He began to sing yesterday afternoon (was probably drunk), not in the trench, but in a little ruined village behind his lines, and at once we sent over a

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dozen or so enormous bombs; we didn't hear any more singing after that.

In the night, when I'm not thinking of wonderful beds and eggs on toast, I try to catch the "note" of the situation. Its strangeness and my being in it overwhelm me. The flying shells make a weird music — it varies according to the size; some are so sweet, like candy — they whine and trail; some make me think of little, crying, lonely children; some die away over the line like musical rhymes of E. A. Poe. They seldom cease day or night. Then the *arions* come and try to shoot us, and Fritz is watching to pop off any head that lifts above the mud bank.

I am happy. I am some one else. My simple comrades are *très gentil*. I think of home — its quiet — its warmth — its serenity — You are in Paradise.

Devotedly,

E.

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April 21, 1918.

Dear Mother —

This morning I received a beautiful pair of socks from you. It was a pleasure to see something so new and clean. My dirty conditions would make you laugh. I feel as though I had been carefully varnished from head to foot. My hair is as stiff as wires with dust. It is frightful, and yet of so little importance. I'm alive and happy and clean inside.

We spent a week in the trenches before the enemy, and now are in reserve three miles in the rear, in a vast and awful mine. We are bombarded constantly by big shells, but there is nothing to fear if we remain inside. Strange to emerge from this Stygian blackness (a candle makes only a tiny yellow ring) and find the sun washing a wide spread of April landscape — blue and green and white — and stranger still the city burning on the horizon and shells exploding in all directions. The serenity of nature is astounding. It remains —

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I feel it stronger than all the hell let loose. The roar passes, the sweetness *is!*

We are to stay here, I fancy, three or four days longer, and then in the night, in whispers, go back to the trenches. I'm glad it is spring. Winter in the trenches must make Death blush. I look at my thin comrades, and thinking of their four years of war, I'm dazed by their splendor. How have they borne it? And each one is as sensitive as I am. Each one is cold and hungry and tired and frightened — just as each one is, in the splendor, warm and rosy and rested and brave.

E.

Au Front.

April 25, 1918.

Chérie —

In the midst of all this bombardment and trenches and filth and *pinard* and comrades, I receive the news that I am to go on *permission* to-night. I can hardly believe it, and for all I'm "crazy"

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to wash up and sit in a chair — that is, crazy to go — still I feel vaguely sorry to leave. However I'm off to-night with Captain Pete. We must walk twenty miles to find the train. Do you feel how excited I am? I trust we shan't be blown to crumbs before we are out of the war zone. This morning Maurice (the chap who sleeps beside me) and I went down the hill from the mine to the little brook and for the first time in ten days I washed my teeth (and other things), but the shells began to whistle near by, so we came home on the run. Curious how one's dirty bunch of straw and one's loaf of bread (I love it) makes "home."

I shall be in Paris for a few days and then go to Dinard *chez les S.* If I can find a hat for you in Paris I shall send it to you. But don't be "difficult." I shall buy it on the "fly." Perhaps I can find a "picture" one for mother.

If I return from this war I will spend the rest of my life giving you a "good

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time", Chérie, but really I had rather be burned to death by liquid fire two times than have the Boches victorious. Death were a personal joy in face of defeat.

Well, Chérie, I must bundle up my *choses* and start for Paris. To-morrow my comrades *mount en ligne* and I shall be "larking" it in Paris. Strange —

Devotedly,

E.

May 8, 1918.

Dear Mother —

As you already know, my *permission* has come and gone like the wind (to me it remains only as a very pleasant dream — a dream filled with the wonderful flowers in F.'s exquisite garden at Dinard), and here I am back with the boys. The change is violent, but your son is a most adaptable man, and he slept last night and has eaten to-day as though he had never seen a clean bed or taken food from a china plate. In truth I was glad to get back here.

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Just why I cannot say; it is all that is materially unpleasant, and yet, as I tell you, I'm happy to be "on the job." The "job" is, for you, unimaginable, but you shall hear about it when I come home. I do hope Mr. Boche won't, at least, shoot my tongue out.

We left Paris yesterday morning at eight o'clock and arrived "somewhere" at noon. After tramping six or seven miles we learned that our regiment had changed its quarters. Fortunately we found a wagon to take us to the 412th. My comrades were delighted to see me. I had brought them a drop to drink and a good cigar. We all made merry. Maurice and François made my bed — the sight of my bed would make you shudder — but I'm the only thing in it that's alive. I slept last night beautifully. This morning I trotted down to the muddy little brook and "washed up", and afterwards sat down on a tree trunk and reread the dear letters I found waiting for me on my

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return from Paris. Two letters from you — one inclosing samples of a dress. I thought their color and quality charming. I am happy when I know you are delightfully dressed. By-the-way, the Captain sent you from Paris (for the socks and wedding cake) a quite lovely scarf. He selected it himself. We both hope it will please you. The Captain orders that you wear it every day. A good soldier obeys his Captain.

We are probably on the move tomorrow. These are very exciting days for the soldier, and all this spring you must go bravely and softly, thinking of me. Remember always I am content with what I have chosen to do. Whatever the cost I shall have the best of the bargain — whatever the cost —

I hope your garden is pushing up lustily, salad and rose. Oh! how I should enjoy working in a garden! I dream of clipping and planting at C. Farm.

Devotedly,

E.

AN AMERICAN POILU

May 11, 1918.

Dear Mother —

Now and again after *la soupe* and before it is dark, we play a game of throwing pennies at a given point. I always win, which enchants my comrades and amuses me. Last night, by great good luck, I threw five sous and gained 114 sous, which amounts to a dollar and a quarter. We finished the game lighted by the end of a candle.

Yesterday we had a great *revue*. The General came and looked us over and gave our regiment a decoration for its recent good work. It was a handsome sight, for all it lacked the glitter of sunshine on our bayonets. Five hundred men standing like statues in a wide crescent in a green field. The music began — the trumpets shouted — and from the wood on the hill in front of us came galloping the General and his train of cavaliers. He was gorgeous in his decorations. His saddle was black

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and gold. He rode before us and behind us, and then arranged himself and his court like a picture of Napoleon, while we filed by him and presented arms. Our flag — the flag of our division — hung in the air like a poem by Lord Byron. Captain Pete looked very fine on his horse. The Légion d'Honneur shone like a rose on his blue coat. Before the ceremony began he galloped by to my company to say *Bon Jour* and to show me the chic way in which his orderly had arranged the tail and mane of his horse. As he came toward me I had again that sad vision of him dead. He looked so thin, so rare — and so good — so good — Then the trumpets and the General. My arm ached to fall off from holding my gun in the same place for so long.

While the decorations were being given on the farther end of the field a man in our company caught a partridge. It was “side splitting” seeing him trying to bag it without disturbing the *revue*.

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He killed it on its nest. It was a beautiful mother bird; there were ten green eggs under her.

Coming home we marched through a lovely forest. The ground was a bed of lily-of-the-valley — the air took me to Bleak House garden.

Last night it began to rain. We all got rather wet. Our roof leaks. We await orders to move. You may, for a time now, follow me in your daily papers. We await orders to go into the "fray" (as Shakespeare and Aunt J. would say — I'm fond of them both).

You understand it isn't easy at present to write, and perhaps letters will be rarer. My heart and soul — my funny dreams — are always with you — and E.

Devotedly,

E.

May 18, 1918.

Chérie —

You will please take note of the change in my address. I am now of

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the 3d Company. By great good fortune Pete is my Captain. The new arrangement came about two days ago. Of course I was enchanted to be put into his company, but also I was sorry to leave my comrades of the 1st Company. I had been with them two months or more (time goes so fast) and had come to love the least — and was beloved of them all. My parting was painful; however, here I am in the 3d Company and already the bond is established. We are young in the 3d Company, most of us under twenty-five. We are Bretons with waving blond hair and blue eyes. We are so young it is painful to think of our present business.

This morning the Captain reviewed the Company. We “presented” very well. He spoke to each man, asked his name and previous occupation. When he arrived in front of me he said in English, “I know.”

Well, and so you will address me in the 3ème Cie. But all letters for me

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will reach me if you don't forget Secteur 49. We are always Secteur 49.

In my last letter I told you we were going north, and here we are a long, long journey from our last cantonment. Two days of marching and thirty hours in the train. I have been frightfully tired — too tired to remember — but my gift of sleep never leaves me. I even slept through a bombardment by *les avions*. I was told afterward all the world was *debout*. Yesterday we all suffered from the intense heat. It was hellish. We had only ten miles to make, but the road was shadowless and the sun overhead. There were moments when I would have given my soul and yours for a drink of water. My shoulders were paralyzed by the weight of my sacks. Besides our ordinary luggage we carried "four days' food" (bread and "monkey" are heavy).

As I said, this is a country of interminable dusty roads zigzagging through vast level fields — beautiful fields no

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doubt to spin by in "Polly", but for the trooper, discouraging. However, I didn't really look at them, my eyes being on the dust just a step ahead of my foot. Some of us fell by the nettles and some of us were carried away on canvas stretchers; all of us were fatigued to the bone. Toward evening we saw ahead, like a plummy oasis in a green desert, our cantonment. We arrived with the twilight. I can't tell you how romantic a little village it is; a strange lost garden of trees from the edges of which roll, away to the horizon, the bare fields. The houses are thatched and colored and centuries old.

We are lodged in a prehistoric sort of barn made like a swallow's nest of timber and mud. It smells of straw. There are no windows, but the roof is literally perforated with holes. This morning when I opened my eyes I saw the mud walls specked with gold disks. For a long time I listened to the doves and the larks. The latter seemed to

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be hanging garlands of song on my roof. The fields (the fields inside the oasis) are brilliant gold — buttercups up to the flowery hawthorn hedges. We can buy nothing here save milk and eggs and butter. Last night I bought twenty quarts (for a dollar) of milk for the tired boys in my section. We stood around while the weird old woman milked the beautiful cows. I also bought eighteen handsome heads of lettuce (for thirty-five cents), to make a camouflage for *le singe*.

This letter was begun beside the buttercups, but it is finished *chez* Captain Pete.

Devotedly,
E.

*3ème Cie. de Mitrailleuses,
412 Rég't d'Infanterie, Secteur 49.
May 30, 1918.*

Dear Mother —

I'm thinking of my father to-day and your father — and the two little flags standing up on their graves. And I hope you have put a flower beside the

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flags. This morning when I awoke — last night a terrible battle in the air — I thought of our graves, so far from me, and wished it were possible for me to climb the hill and find Wistaria Path and look at those two little stones — and the grass — and the flags. Later when we were making a sham attack in a divine little wood — its ferns are knee high — I was thinking all the time of those two little flags and the so-long-dead soldiers underneath. Walking back through the fields from the divine wood — my comrades singing and laughing and “ragging” like holiday children — I decided to arrange an extra something to eat for my comrades’ supper in memory of those two far-away flags and the men under them. It isn’t easy to market here, but with the Captain’s help, I’ve found white wine and three cans of green peas and a pound of butter. Just that makes a fête for my section this evening.

Our weather is glorious; we eat under a great linden tree that drops odd little

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seeds into our tin dishes; we sit on boxes filled with cartridges — we are disgracefully inelegant — but we are so friendly and kind and young. I fancy our fathers ate in about the same way in 1861; anyway, they sup with us this evening — under the big tree on the boxes — and all of us so friendly and kind. You too, my dear, will be with us — because you are always with me. But you must not listen to all of the jokes we shall find in the white wine. So young we are, but our jokes — well — I'm sure our fathers told them or laughed at them in 1861.

Nothing changes, dear, so you know I am

Devotedly,
E.

*3ème Cie. de Mitrailleuses,
412ème Rég't d'Infanterie, Secteur 49.*

June 5, 1918.

Dear Mother —

Isn't this the anniversary of your wedding day? It seems so to me, but

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perhaps I'm mistaken; you know I was so very young at the time of your nuptials. What a charming bride you must have been, and what a good time you must have had, so long ago in June. Well, my dear, to-day I'm somewhere else from where I last wrote you. We have traveled many miles from the quaint little village hidden in the oasis of trees. A day and a half we were in the train, that is I was on a truck — with two machine guns, on the lookout for bombarding aeroplanes. The day was an agony of grilling sunshine and the night was cold; however, we were fortunate in regard to the bombs. A soldier's life is a series of miraculous escapes, or else we must believe in fatality and know we are immortal until our name is called. I have talked with so many soldiers who have fought since the beginning of the war and not a scratch to show for it, and I've heard of others who were killed in their first attack. Is it all luck or is it fatality,

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or do the two words mean the same thing? I am lucky to-day — I'm beautifully alive, and the beauty of this countryside is for me — the iridescent canal — the iridescent dragon fly — the iridescent forest — the iridescent sky, all is to me this fifth of June, 1918. And memory is mine too; I am across the Atlantic — I am at home. I am kissing you and asking if this isn't the anniversary of your marriage?

Devotedly,
E.

*3ème Cie. de Mitrailleuses,
412ème Rég't d'Infanterie, Secteur 49.
June 6, 1918.*

Mon cher Bourard —

Since last night your affectionate Pecuchet has refused to take this war seriously. From now on until I am as dead as Marley or a taxpayer in M. I shall be a broad grin. Everything is so unexpected, so droll. For a year (I enlisted July 27, 1917) I've tried to

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be serious, but I give it up. My recent letters have told you with what awful haste and fatigue our regiment left the oasis of the north. It was a divine Sunday and very hot; we marched for ten miles (I sweated so the march was a swim for me) and we slept that night in a lovely orchard under the stars. At dawn we were put like cattle into a train (I worked like a galley slave helping to push "things" on to the trucks) and rode for twenty-four hours. My section was on a truck with two machine guns — waiting to defend us against *les avions*. Nothing happened.

We arrived in a dead city; everybody had flown — fearing invasion by the Boches. We were terribly tired and terribly dirty. We marched to our present cantonment, which is only a few miles from the foe. We expected the first day to go into battle at any moment. Nothing happened. Well, last night the officers invited me to go fishing. "*Bon,*" says I, "let us go fishing." We went

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and, cher Bouvard, what do you think I did? I saw?

The canal was exquisite — a page by Rodenbach; we spread a net, and retreating from it a hundred feet, turned and proceeded to advance towards it step by step, beating the water with long poles. I never saw anything so funny, so pastoral. We became so warm with the violent exercise that we threw our coats to the ground and continued to beat the mysterious water. Then we lifted the net — fishes — a dozen squirming silvery ones! Did you ever hear of anything so quaint? We brought home two dozen of them — and we laughed like schoolboys. The cannon meanwhile were roaring away like mad, but for us it might well have been in another star. We came here to fight for liberty and justice and behold — we fish — and laugh!

And the countryside is so lovely this month of May. This canal flowing so gently before me — and the light of

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this evening sky. The *décor* is one of green-gold and pearl. A dragon fly in peacock blue sits on a yellow iris by my side. We are mirrored in the canal. Birds call from the forest. Does it read like a soldier's letter? Doubtless the war is going on somewhere (I hear it in fact) but for me this May evening is a picture serene as Helen of Troy and colored like Cleopatra's eyes.

Devotedly,
Pecuchet.

*3ème Cie. de Mitrailleuses,
412ème Reg't d'Infanterie, Secteur 49.
June 7, 1918.*

Mon cher Bourard —

I wrote you last evening of the comedy of this life, and directly after posting the letter I wondered if I hadn't tempted the gods, for before going to bed a frightful bombardment began "up north" and we were told we might be ordered to face the music at dawn. Sure enough, at three o'clock the word came, and in a

jiffy we were on our feet and rolling up our blankets, with the strange thought spinning in the chilly air that another day might find us sound asleep with our ancestors. It was a splendid "tearing about" for thirty minutes, and then the word came that neither Liberty nor Justice needed our assistance or blood for at least another half day. It was funny — and somehow I felt slightly disappointed. It is so flat to be armed to the cyetooth at 3:30 A.M. and then to find there is nothing to defend or kill.

Well, Pete called for hot coffee, and when it appeared we sat down and breakfasted and laughed like children. The day grew golden at the window, and I saw the ancient church on the slope was as serene as yesterday. To-morrow? To-morrow? I haven't an idea about to-morrow. But I shall be glad when it is the fourth of July. If we are going to fight before summer we must begin pretty soon. A battlefield in hot August must

be a horror of horrors, and the stench and the thirst! How foolish this war is!

I've a new occupation. I'm the *télé-mètreur* of our Company. I carry on my back a huge apparatus (something like an ogre's rolling pin) into which, after arranging it before me on a huge three-legged stand, I gaze with one eye and discover a house or a tree two miles away miraculously near my nose. Then, by certain delicate movements of which I'm the master, and no small amount of arithmetic, I can tell the Captain the exact number of yards between me and anything in sight, thus enabling the gunner to locate the heart of the approaching foe. It is interesting work.

In place of a gun I carry a revolver — like an officer; this pleases me. A revolver is so easily managed, I've an idea I could pop off the Kaiser long before he could lift his gun. In the German army each *mitrailleur* is provided with a revolver. *Le télé-mètreur*

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is always with the Captain — that is somewhere near the head of the company — and that pleases me also. I think of you these June days.

Devotedly,
Pecuchet.

Battlefield — Poste de Secours,
June 12, 1918.

Mother —

Two days now we have been in battle. Pete was wounded this afternoon. The beautiful Captain is wounded and has been carried away. I took him on my shoulder from the battlefield a mile. We found a stretcher. We were only separated by perhaps sixty feet when the shell came down and wounded him in the leg and shoulder. I am alone — I am a frozen tear — not only for Pete's wound (not terribly serious) and departure, but for the unbelievable sorrow, horror, slaughter — I don't know what — that I've seen. My escape has been a miracle; we have been shelled for

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hours — and gassed — and shot at from the German *mitrailleuses* and the devils in the air.

I am writing this — I have force to write this — because I am full of brandy. I am crying hard inside. It is more terrible than any one has written or told. The battle is still raging on a front of many miles. We are progressing foot by foot. I'm in a calm corner for a moment, as I left our battle hill to help my Captain. It is awful and I'm strangled by the affection in me for my poor comrades — for all the world. It is too awful. To-night — to-morrow? How can any one live in this hell?

Excuse this scribble, it's all one-sided I know, but I write to tell you I'm untouched and that the Captain is wounded; curious he was wounded during the first time since we attacked that we were not within four yards of each other. The sun has shone all day. The flowers in the field are beyond belief — larkspur

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— miles of its blue — poppies — clover,
etc.

I love you with my heart and soul.

Good-by for to-day,
E

*3ème Cie. Mitrailleuses,
412ème Rég't d'Infanterie, Secteur 57.*

June 19, 1918.

Dear H. H. —

The battle — it recedes — I am able to look back at it — I will tell you what I see, for I cannot tell what I felt — because, well, because I felt every sort of a feeling during the three days we were in the hell.

At twilight June 10th, after a short march, we embarked in the motor trucks and rode all night towards somewhere. I have told you how thoroughly exhausting the motor journeys are; the dust — the lack of room — the smell of essence, etc., render the maximum of fatigue. It was four o'clock when we

disembarked by the side of a road running through a dreary, flat landscape. Not a village, not a farm in sight ; the roar of the distant cannon filling the air. We had received pressing orders so that the mules and horses were left behind ; thus it was necessary for my company to push the machine guns and cases of cartridges — we did so for five miles. Remember, none of us had slept the night ; most of us were suffering with headaches.

At six o'clock, in a weird, dismantled village, we were told we were to attack that morning at eleven o'clock. A half hour's repose and we were on the march again, passing through a country brightening to the sun — the day. I helped push the material until the pain in my ribs made it impossible. It was a long march — perhaps twelve miles. The scene was very exciting — thousands of wagons and horsemen and soldiers converging from the three corners. In the shelter of a high cliff — a kind of quarry

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— we assembled; over the brow the attack was already in progress. We waited our turn to advance, laughing, eating, saying “*Au 'voir*” and watching the stretcher bearers already returning with ghastly wounded — a rage of thunder was over the brow.

Noon — “*en avant*” — company formed; we went over the top — not of a trench you understand, but of the cliff. This was open warfare, *guerre de mouvement*. Of course I didn't know what to expect “over the top.” A superb and vast roll of fields — colored like a painting — flowers of every kind and color — blue and red and pink and yellow and purple, brilliantly gilded by the sun. Miles and miles of flowers. To right and left as far as I could see, thin rows of soldiers marching. The Adjutant leading, I coming directly after, and behind me at a little distance our section — the Captain was to the right with the Commandant.

Huge shells were falling around us — exploding with sickening shrieks. We

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heard them whistling as they approached — we threw ourselves flat to the ground — here and there torn holes in the ground — a yard away a bloody spot, a gun. Sometimes we lay in the flowers for half an hour, eating the seeds of the tall wheat.

“*En avant.*” We were up — almost every soldier had gathered a bouquet. Always the howling shells, always the flowery fields more and more golden under the declining sun. It was superb — like the beginning of a symphony by Beethoven. We made eight miles or so like this, not one of the *Bème Cie.* receiving a wound. At seven o’clock we were under the hill — the Boches had retreated to the other side. Seven o’clock? It must have been later — it was growing dusk. Boche wounded were lying about. How I hate their compact little heads!

The third section — my section — of the *mitrailleuses* was ordered to the left — a mile perhaps — and the Captain

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ordered me to go with them (I was detached from the section as liaison), make a plan of the path and the emplacement of the gun, and bring it back to him. Going down the valley I talked with the friends from other companies that I met — I said a word to the gray wounded — I glanced at the dead. We crossed an open space and sat down on the slopes of the hill. A terrific bombardment was starting, and a rain of bullets from an indirect “tir” of a machine gun was falling on the open road. A company of men entered it at the same time ; they began to run — to fall — to cry — to bleed. Notice, by a mere chance — a minute — we came through. The shells were coming down like mad. Suddenly five soldiers stumbled down the hill among us — five poor men in agony with the gas ; they were awful to contemplate.

The Adjutant gave me the drawing of the path and told me to take my chance and return to the Captain. The

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bullets had stopped coming. I flew across the open space. I ran like fire along the valley. That mile sprint will remain with me forever. Most of the shells had fallen there — the sights were too grotesque — the mutilated bodies, Ah! The soldiers were crowded against the slope — their faces glittering. The dead were serene as old marbles — one young dead I shall always see. He was so beautiful — his rifle under his long hand. Coming down the valley I had talked with a charming fellow whom I've known since last autumn. Hearing my name called (when returning, I was the only person moving) I looked up and there was my friend on his back, waving two hideous stumps — both legs torn away within the half hour. Officers hidden under the hill cried out to me to run faster. I ran as fast as I could — I reached the Captain and the rest of the Company. He was glad to see me — the shells always falling — but we were sheltered a little by the hill.

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It grew dark — we spread our blanket and went to sleep — I was empty — We were to attack to the right at dawn. A charming lieutenant slept on my “other side.” He spoke a few English words to me before sleeping; at noon the next day his head was cut off by a piece of shell. At dawn the Company was on the move to the right — every way the wounded were coming in, towards the Poste de Secours. Poor mortals, they were tragic — tragic — tragic — and divine — the horror of it — the whiteness — the love of it. I saw one wounded man carrying another wounded comrade on his shoulder, walking slowly — slowly — utterly regardless of the ever falling shells. I saw Fritz red with his detested blood being borne on a stretcher by four Frenchmen. The Captain’s orderly had a bottle of cognac — we drank of it. There was a road to cross — in full view of the enemy — we crossed it in little groups on the fly. Remember, each of us had all his “stuff” on his back,

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something like thirty pounds; the fatigue is outrageous — but death never found a soldier tired — *la vie est si forte, mon Dieu.*

Well, the foe, seeing us dashing across the road, knew we would pass through the village near by (which we did) and he put down a curtain of fire — an unbelievable rage of shells — to right — to left — behind — before. They always fell away from me — we ran — we stopped — we crept — we lay flat in the gutters. That village, H. H., is indescribable. It had been recently occupied; it was a beautiful village — lovely old houses — gardens — fountains, etc. It was a hell of the wildest variety, mad! The flowery plants danced on the tumbling window sills. The air was gray with powder and smoke, and we were running like crazy children through the crazy streets — a nightmare — we lost the turning. The Captain was as calm as an operative soldier — his map in his hand — I was at his heel — trying

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to decide to throw away at least half the stuff on my shoulders. I remember I had a whimsical desire to walk into a house — I saw such charming bric-a-brac waiting to be smashed. The air was one long howl, bang, bang, bang. For a little time we wore our gas masks — and the insanity was complete. I laughed as I ran. The roofs fell in — the great trees whisked to the paving — the garden walls jumped and toppled — the soldiers cried out. Oh, our passing through that village on June 12th was a scream of everything outlandish that you can think of.

Then we sneaked along by a hedge — before us the fields — the sun — the flowers. The enemy saw us leaving the village just as he had seen us entering — another curtain of fire — we gained a little shelter and sat down. I was soon very sleepy and hungry. The shells pounded down on every side. I heard shrieks I shall always hear. We waited “there” for two hours, then we were

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ordered to return a hundred or so yards and take a position on the hill. Cautiously we crept back, trying to hide ourselves in the hollows and the hedge — but the foe saw us and the shells began to arrive — I lost two dear comrades there. The dead sitting in the sun that we passed were frightful — some with the face completely blown away. We ran up the hill through a graveyard, and for the next hour I can't see why we were not all destroyed. Bang, bang, and then we were up and running to another place — always the shells fell behind me.

Up to this time I had been with the Captain — ahead. He was obliged to leave us for a quarter of an hour to get orders from the Major. During his absence the poor men became dizzy — they couldn't stay still. The shells doubled in violence. I saw Pete coming back, walking quite calmly and looking for us where he had left us. I called out "Pierre." He heard me, he started towards me — we were most of us crouch-

ing in a waving wheat field — but some of the men had placed themselves in an old trench. Pete stopped to order them to advance — a huge shell arrived — exploded — and the beautiful Captain was wounded.

They called to me — I saw him so white — and his trouser leg already red with blood. For a moment I couldn't believe he was touched — I don't know why it seemed so impossible. Leaning on my shoulder, we staggered across the field, regardless now of shell or bullet. We managed to walk half a mile — found a stretcher, and Pete was carried away to the Poste de Secours — I followed. The doctor cut away his clothes — his shoe was full of blood — a small hole in the side of his leg — a bandage — a good-by — and he was put into an American ambulance — and rode away. I say nothing of the victims (Boches and French) rambling and crying and waiting and dying around the Poste de Secours — it was a shambles.

The afternoon sun was over everything — gold — gold — gold — and I was alone — as I can never be alone again — in full battle — my unfailing friend gone from me. Well, I sat down and wrote a word to Mother. I had to. Later I found my corporal and passed the awful night. At dawn we were relieved, departing under an intense bombardment — some of us were wounded by our own shells — we came away pinched as ghosts and singing vaguely. Our regiment had done magnificent work. I have only tried to tell you little details which I trust the censors will not blot out. That day at noon we reached our cantonment. I found a vacant corner, and covering my dirty face with my dirty handkerchief wept for all the sorry world.

For three nights and nearly as many days I had been steady as iron — obeying instantly every order — always ahead. Indeed my *sangfroid* was admired by both officers and soldiers, and I have been proposed for the Croix de Guerre.

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If I receive it, I hope you will be proud — and offer a bottle of champagne à la *Français* to some one. My section is planning a fête with garlands over the table the day I'm decorated. Strange I should be a soldier wearing a war medal.

Ah, they were outrageous hours there in the sunshine, the flowers (fields of larkspur) and the slaughter. I've said nothing about the bullets and the bombs from the planes — or the tanks. When I return I will tell you about it all.

To-morrow, June 20th, there is to be a service in the church for our dead — *mort sur le Champ d'Honneur*. Poor, poor dead! I went with them — I loved them — I took their chances — I left them there (I came away untouched) — the service — the glory to them — and the grave on the field of honor.

My letter is too long to reread. I know it is filled with errors. Forgive them — it will give you an idea at least of my first battle — my first attack —

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only an idea — I'm not in writing mood. If I could communicate with exactitude the vibrations of those days (coming so late in my life) their madness — their pitiless beauty — their horrible horror — their annihilation of me as a personality and their something else for which I have no words, etc., you would weep as I did after they were over and I was safe.

Here I've started another sheet and my story is finished. No word as yet from the Captain. He will come back as soon as he can — at least he said so when he left me.

This is a vastly lonely and difficult time for me, H. H. I hope you are writing me often — I need that comfort.

Devotedly,
E.

June 29, 1918.

My dear Mother —

My recent letters have been doleful reading I'm sure and doubtlessly have

made you and E. feel quite miserable. But, my dear mother, it was a doleful letter or no letter at all. You understand that my comrades have never suspected my *cafard*. I'm always ready to smile, I've been apparently contented, but the instant I began to write — to think of you and home — the sadness of my June overwhelmed me and I relaxed to my fatigue. That has passed. It somehow fades to film. I'm ready to go into another battle.

Poor Pete is in the hospital with his cruel wounds. The operations have been successful and it is only a matter of a few weeks before he will be back again. He has been so good to me — and we started out together — we encountered the fire together. I wish I had been wounded by the same shell that disabled him; I would like to share his sufferings. Poor Pete, he was so superb on the battlefield, and so dry and white with his clothes red with blood when I helped him away. It was

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just after he left in the ambulance that I wrote to you — at the Poste de Secours. I wonder what I could have written you. I was at the climax of all my sensations and I sat down quietly and wrote a letter. I should like to read that piece of paper.

Well, yesterday it was officially announced before the company that I was to be decorated by the regiment with the Croix de Guerre. My citation (you shall have it later) was read, and I blushed to be so strangely complimented.

That summer when at C. we read of the explosion of war in Europe, who could have imagined that your son would be awarded a medal for his bravery in one of the battles? If I come home I shall appear in a bright blue uniform and wearing a decoration. Will you recognize me?

What a pity you cannot see the ceremony of decorating! What a pity the Captain will not see it either; that

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touches something under the eyelids. I shall be quite alone when the Colonel pins it to my coat. My comrades are enchanted with my citation; they plan a fête of wine and flowers for the repast following the ceremony.

The landscape this evening is Claude Lorraine — that is to say, inundated by a golden haze. I am sitting in a field, but I shan't remain here long; every sort of insect is trying to tickle or bite me.

Devotedly,
E.

July 9, 1918.

Dear Mother —

For the last three days we've been surrounded by American soldiers (our blue streets changed in a short summer night to khaki color); they are simply all over the place — sitting against the houses, sleeping under the hedges, walking up and down and across the roads. When the café opens they rush in and get “lit up” and dance and sing and

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make improper proposals to the "doll" who brings them their sarsaparilla. They talk American, which is a hair-curling language vaguely reminiscent of English. They make a noise they call French. They are taller and thinner than was ever our Abraham Lincoln. They spend money as Hetty Green didn't. I fancy they are all more or less nostalgic. They cannot understand a man being in the French army for five cents a day when he might be in the American receiving one dollar a day. They are charming and mysterious and unaccountable. They are the new world. They wear the uniform badly, but their teeth are a brilliant lesson of beauty and health to the poilu. I was invited last night to eat with them — a corporal I had run across two weeks ago in another village being my host. (He has an aunt in Brockton!)

I was very interested to be an American soldier for the time of a meal — to watch how Uncle Sam does it. (I should

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have been served an infinitely better supper had I remained *chez moi*.) After the beans had disappeared and the cup of coffee also, I invited the corporal to the café for a drink. We sat in a quiet corner and he told me of his stepmother's quick temper. The room filled (the quiet corner vanished) and cup by cup the songs grew louder. Do you know "Go Easy, Mabel"? It must be a lovely song, because they sang it over and over and over. I've always read it is only the beautiful that can survive repetition.

It was late when the "doll" tried to say "Good night" in American and we zigzagged forth into the dreaminess of summer and stars and darkness. The conversation whirled around the "doll" — suddenly she had become the symbol of all that is desirable. (Poor thing, I pass her every day and can plainly see she hasn't washed her neck for a long time.) But last night I'm sure "Our Boys" dreamed of her with a neck whiter than Helen of Troy's! Poor chaps, they

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are just back from the trenches and the Atlantic is wide.

E.

July 13, 1918.

Dear Mother —

Just a word which may be of no importance but — how can one tell? We are expecting to go into battle any hour now, and if anything tiresome should hit me on the head and I should in consequence go wandering off to pastures new behind the sun — beyond the moon — there is something I want you to do for me. Failing myself to return to M., my Croix de Guerre would be sent to you. I'm profoundly touched and proud of my Croix de Guerre. It is the climax of my life. It is more than a war decoration; it stands for me as the symbol of all that is superbly unexpected. Do you understand me? Well, sweet mother, I want H. to keep my Croix de Guerre with him for a year. After that it is yours. This is only a word

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and may be, as I said, of no importance. Surely we shall be together again. I shall carry your courage with me into battle.

Devotedly,
E.

July 18, 1918.

Mother —

We are in a lovely summer forest. We are awaiting the word to take our places in the great battle. I am happy — happy to go forward to help — to die — or to return to you and my sister and my brother and H. Whatever happens to me I shall have you in my heart, as I know I shall rest in yours. It is good to be a soldier.

Forever — mother — sister —
E.

July 24, 1918.

In Hospital.

Dear Mother —

I was wounded the 21st of this month. We attacked at dawn and before eight

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o'clock I was shot in both legs — just below the knees — the ball remaining in the right leg. The following twenty-four hours were very painful — very painful. On July 22nd, at one o'clock, in a hospital near the front, I was operated upon and the bullet extracted. Yesterday the first dressing was made — the pain was frightful — another dressing this afternoon. To-morrow I'm carried away on a stretcher to a hospital in the interior.

E.

Hôpital Complémentaire 37.

Salle 2, Laral, Mayenne.

July 29, 1918.

Dear Mother —

The last letter I wrote you (it seems a lifetime ago) was a miserable attempt to meet the situation — that is, we were marching (how tired I was and my ten toes were in a state of decay; I'm not joking — the sight and smell of my feet appalled me) towards battle.

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It was my last chance to write, and what can one say at so uncertain a moment? I've the traditional desire (it may be stupid) to say good-by before I die, but it's all a matter of chance on the battlefield, and if one is lucky then his good-by has only caused his far-away mother to be unhappy for no reason at all — which is obviously stupid.

I sent you a broken-winged little adieu July 19. July 21st, at dawn, we went into the hell (to get to our position we were obliged to walk through a cesspool of American corpses — horrible!) and two hours later I came out of it — the passage hole of a bullet in my left leg and the bullet itself nicely and painfully lodged in my right leg — just below the knee (happily bone, cord, nerve not touched).

I was dripping blood from my waist to my shoes — only one wound had been bandaged on the battlefield. The shells were falling like rain and the air a twang of bullets from the German machine guns (tanks) but I limped through

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it all for a mile to the first dressing station. I say nothing of the dead and dying encountered at every step. The frantic wheat seemed to be crying "Save me! Save me!"

I limped along. At the Poste de Secours (unimaginable confusion of wounded) the doctor cut away my trousers and dressed my wounds. I saw that the stretcher bearers were snowed under, and as I could limp, I limped on — and before I was put on a stretcher (my leg purple and the size of three) I had limped ten miles. An American ambulance carried me to a railroad station, and after a long, long dreary wait in the hot sun we (a thousand wounded) were huddled into the train. We rode all night. I do not wish to take that journey again — nothing to eat — to drink — dirt and blood — crowded compartment — everybody wounded — Mon Dieu.

The morning brought us to Beauvais — plenty of kind help, plenty of stretch-

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ers — the hospital. Some one undressed me (I write all this because I know the detail interests you), washed me, and the doctor took an X-ray of my legs. An hour later I was dead to all the world — beautifully dead — on the high operating table. Towards dusk, I came to — a soft bed — comfortable — my leg bound solidly into a long zinc “gutter.” Lacking a few days I had been a soldier for one year — and now was a *blessé*. The fever began to mount and the leg to scream. I did the best I could, but I had to cry. The kind nurse reminded me that a brave soldier mustn’t dishonor himself by tears. I said I was tired and had a strong desire to throw something at her head. However, I did nothing so energetic — but cried as long as it was a pleasure to do so. Pain is the only real thing in life. To be wounded is nothing — to die less — but to have a wound dressed each day even by the gentlest hands in the world is too awful for words. After my first dress-

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ings I was an icy rag for three hours. But already I've borne the dressing each day for a week and so I know I shall stand it until the leg heals. Hasn't it all been a sacrifice? I accept. Needless to say when I see *les grandes blessés*, I smile at my leg in the zinc gutter; how do they live — the terribly wounded? Well, I remained three days at Beauvais and then journeyed in the hospital train (there were many Americans also — they attacked with us) all night to Laval. I was glad to come here, as there is nothing to fear from *les arions*. Fritz has a way, as you read in the papers, of bombarding hospitals near the front. What a pity I could not have been sent to Dinard where Pete is mending! But a simple soldier must follow orders and I was ordered to Laval. It's not bad here — only it's very poor, and we lack all comforts — except that greatest comfort — kindness; everybody is beautifully kind, and from my bed I can see the sunshine in the garden.

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No letters as yet; it will be a fête when some arrive.

I feel so intensely your eagerness to help me — smooth the sheets — wash my hands, etc. (you understand that I can hardly move an inch), that it almost seems as though you actually did — by some mystery — so that hours are less long — and I sleep better at night.

Devotedly,
E.

July 29, 1918.
In Hospital.

Chérie —

There's a beautiful young woman in this hospital who is an angel to your poilu. The first time I was taken into the *salle de pansement* to have my wound dressed she was there. When I told her I was a *volontaire* she complimented me, and proceeded to make my dressing with all the gentleness in the world. I suffered, but no one could have worked

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more tenderly than did the beautiful young woman. Now when I'm taken into the *salle de pansement* and she is not there, I begin to sweat before my bandages have been touched. This morning she came into the ward, bringing me plums and two eggs and a pot of wine-colored jelly. She is a beautiful young woman. I am told she has lost two brothers in the war, her husband has been wounded, and her mother only lately escaped from the invaded part of France.

The fellow in bed beside me is a big chap — a gunner — wounded the 21st of July in the ankle.

Last night I slept very well because I tried an entirely new position. *I slept on my wounded leg!* Yes, with a great effort I turned the zinc box completely over on its side and threw my left leg over the box; then, arranging my stomach and chest, I fell asleep. I can't guess what the position did to the wound. It may have split it wide open,

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but anyway I slept. Chérie, I hope you will never have to sleep with your leg strapped into a zinc "gutter."

Devotedly,
E.

*Hôpital Complémentaire 37,
Salle 2, Laval, Mayenne.
July 29, 1918.*

Chérie —

Yesterday a beautiful happening — but you would have to be a poor *blessé* in a poor military hospital to feel all its beauty. I arrived here three days ago — without even a handkerchief — without even a pair of trousers, and yesterday morning before eight o'clock the door of the long ward opened and in a haze I saw Captain Pierre coming towards me, followed by a man carrying a large straw case. My Captain, who was wounded in a hospital at Dinard, was actually standing by my bed — it was too beautiful to be real.

But it was Pete — a little pale — a

little bending under his wounded shoulder. He had received a letter — a word — from me the day before, and regardless of doctors, wounds and a threatened operation, he had traveled all day — slept on a miserable sofa all night (the only place he could find in Laval) — and was come to see me early in the morning. He brought me everything I need — and candy and cigarettes and ham and toilet paper. And he told me he would send a cable to H. and already he had written to Paris to hear if it will be possible for me to be transferred to his hospital at Dinard. And, Chérie, when you are wounded — in bed — a leg strapped into a gutter — and very tired — a visit of this kind is a beautiful happening. I shall never forget it. He told me about his wounds: the one in his leg is already nearly healed (he was wounded June 12th, you know) but the shoulder wound doesn't heal and another operation is necessary. If you feel like it write him a letter — it would

please him very much — and we know the days are terribly long in a hospital. Mme. S. and N. have been angels to him.

How beautiful it must be at their villa this midsummer — flowers all over the place and the whole reflected in the sea! But for all the summer — the beauty — no one in France is gay — far from it; the weight of the multitude of sufferers is in the air. The recent attacks of Foch have filled the hospitals to overflowing. But what a splendid check for the Boches! July 21st was for me a great orgy of pleasure; I thought it of course my last day and I insisted on enjoying it. The amount of death flying around was fantastic, but I didn't have a moment's hint of fear. I forgot everything in the world but my desire to advance, and we did advance regardless of shell and bullet. I was standing when I was wounded, and for a moment thought I had merely been hit by a flat stone.

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Your spirit is around my bed all the time. I feel it.

Devotedly,
E.

*Hôpital Complémentaire 37,
Salle 2, Laval, Mayenne.
August 7, 1918.*

Your night before the Fourth letter arrived to-day, Chérie.

You wonder what I am doing. I remember my night before the Fourth. I was drinking too much white wine with a group of American soldiers. We were in a weird old cottage on the outskirts of the town in which I was *cantoned*. The cafés were closed — it was late, but somehow we had discovered this miserable sort of kitchen, and there we sat and asked each other, "Where do you come from in America?" I remember we were all delightfully "lit up" and sang and flirted with the horrible old bone and rag who provided us with the brew that cheers.

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Well, naturally, I was very tired the morning after — the morning of the glorious Fourth — and, as there were no exercises for our company, I was astonished at five o'clock to hear all my comrades getting up and calling to me to do the same. It was unheard of in our section. I got up ignorant and sleepy and amazed. I stepped out to the table where our meals are served (under a charming tumble-down shelter) and, behold, a Fourth of July fête arranged in my honor by my blessed little comrades. A fête of flowers — a gorgeous bouquet in a broken pot on the table (two fellows had left the straw before daybreak and pillaged a garden) and on the old rear wall — a wall golden with age and early light — a huge fan of bluets, daisies and poppies. It was patriotic and handsome. "*Vive l'Amérique!*" and we drank our morning coffee.

Do you feel how charming it was of my poilus to "fix" that up for me?

That evening was our fête — wine

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and song and laughter in the brown barn that grew to me, before the dinner was over, to seem like a magical boat of romance, hallucinated and detached, floating away in the exquisite summer night. Already, how long ago that merry evening; everything recedes so rapidly. Some of those singing chaps are dead; I remember their faces — their open mouths. Most of the others, like me, are wounded.

Your letters are still too old-fashioned, as I might say, to seem contemporary and real. I want the next "batch."

E.

August 17, 1918.

Hôpital 37, Laval, Mayenne.

Beloved Mother —

Lieutenant Hunault (he now commands the *3ème Compagnie* and is, by the way, a great friend of mine) has forwarded my second citation. You will remember my first was from the Regi-

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ment; this one comes from the Division. Well, I am very proud and I hope you, to celebrate (it was life or death you know), will explode another bottle of ginger ale. But first read the citation. (It means another star on my Croix de Guerre.)

H—, E—, Citoyen américain engagé dans l'armée française. Agent de transmission entre son Cd. de Cie. et les sections arancées, a accompli remarquablement sa mission malgré des feux extrêmement violents de mitrailleuses, a donné un bel exemple de sangfroid et de courage. Grièvement blessé le 21 juillet, 1918. Citation à l'ordre de la Division No. 366 du 5 août 1918

(Signé) Bremont.

Do you know what time it is? Six o'clock in the morning. The ward is sound asleep, excepting Number 42. The windows are all tightly closed, of course, it being a French hospital, and the air is putrid, but, through the window,

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I can smell the dew on the garden. The lower leaves of the young horse-chestnut tree are brilliant gold. Apollo has one leg out of bed. Five hours later he will stick his yellow head into your windows and Norkie will begin to chirp, chirp. At seven o'clock Grandmère will come in and twenty heads (some banded like badly wrapped mummies — an eye, a nose, "*en panne*") will pop up from twenty cots and cry "*Bon Jour, Grandmère.*" Then the *blessé* nearest the window will reach out with a crutch and open the casement, and gold, dew, leaves, garden, morn, fragrance will rush in and chase the sleep out of the ward.

Coffee comes in a huge green tin jug (not very clean, I fancy). Behold another day inaugurated!

Devotedly,
E.

AN AMERICAN POILU

August 17, 1918.

Hôpital 37, Laval, Mayenne.

Chérie —

I was surprised that the *vaguemestre* brought me no letters from you to-day. Just why I was so certain to receive a letter from you to-day I don't know, but on coming to this morning I felt in my "bones" I should hear from you either at nine o'clock or at four. The *vaguemestre* came in at nine and four bringing his bag of letters; the names were cried out — but mine was not mentioned. So much for my "bones"! I consoled myself (I wasn't at all sad) by sticking my nose deeper into that most charming of all books "*Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*", and therein I read, "*Chacun fait à sa manière le rêve de sa vie*", and, "*Rien n'existe que ce qu'on imagine*", and the afternoon dwindled as summer afternoons do, and supper came in and was eaten. And now I will go for a walk around the ward.

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The crutches are at hand — I mount them — and stamp — scuff — stamp — scuff — I go into the center of the big room. The stamp is the crutch, the scuff is my one slippered foot. The comrades are watching me from their pillows. It is so miserably dull here. The light is failing. I should like to do something to amuse everybody, to start a laugh. Without saying a word, I let both crutches bang to the floor and by the grace of God and considerable will and pain, I continued to walk as though I had suddenly been cured by a miracle. A howl of laughter rings from the pillows. I have succeeded in making them laugh and also assured myself that I shall in time be as strong on my legs as I was before Fritz shot me. I say walked, but it was more of a rabbit hop than a walk; but I held my head in the air as though going down the Rue de la Paix — and my point was gained — the fellows laughed.

AN AMERICAN POILU

Will the *vaguemestre* bring your letter to-morrow? Yes, I feel it in my "bones."

E.

August 21, 1918.

Hôpital 54, Dinard, Ille et Vilaine.

Chérie —

A month ago to-day Fritz sent his bullet into my leg; a month ago to-day you wrote a beautiful letter to Pete. (It arrived this morning and I have explained for him the difference between your y's and f's.) Strange to think how differently you and I were occupied on July 21st. Well. I must tell you how I got here. As you know, Pete received a permit from Paris, and later (last Sunday) the doctor in Laval received an order allowing me to be sent to Dinard. I made the trip alone, with a pair of brilliantly varnished yellow crutches and a pea-green chintz bag on my arm. Other ways I was a droll figure. My shoes were new and nigger-

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ish (light tan), my trousers were stiff cotton khaki, my coat was my blue uniform coat, only in cleansing away the stain of battle it had become a small baby's ulster — I wore a little blue hat on my head — three days' beard and the Croix de Guerre (its first appearance).

I had the devil's own time getting in and out of the trains (the crutches are so stiff), which I was forced to do often, as nothing goes directly from Laval to Dinard (except thoughts). I made three changes. However, men and women of all sorts and conditions called out like angelic conductors, "Make place for the wounded poilu!" and helped me and my crutches in and out. Everybody wanted to carry my chintz bag, but I held to it like any other old lady. Whenever I saw my shoes, I was frightened. The leg ached somewhat and children in the train walked on it, but I was so glad to be on my way to Dinard that I merely smiled to myself and the

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children. A nun jumped over it when she left the coach at Dinan. It barred the passage. Afterward a huge fishwife with a big basket of chickens got in and nearly broke "it" in two by resting her basket on it. All this began at Laval (one o'clock) and ended after dark (nine-thirty) at Dinard. The afternoon was lovely and I saw the night come over the summer fields. I was content and happy.

Pete the unfailing (it was his first day out after the second operation) was at the station to meet me, and also N. dressed for a ball. She insisted that on my way to the hospital I stop for a moment at the Villa, only for a moment to say good-evening to F. She drove away in her carriage and Pete and I followed in ours. The door burst open and F., so beautifully dressed, was holding out her hands to welcome me. The light behind her seemed unnaturally brilliant — and I went in — crutches, green bag and all. The house looked

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like an apartment in fairyland — dancers and flowers and light. We went to the glittering dining room (so gorgeous after Salle L) and drank cold champagne. The garden, the sea outside, were a fête of moonbeams. It was to me enchanting, but I was trembling between my two crutches.

At the hospital Pete had arranged everything for me. It is paradise here and we are as happy as two poets. By great good fortune, I am in his large chamber (only for officers) in a beautiful white bed (forbidden to move for two weeks) and by my side a window — a window looking on to the sea, and the tides moving in and out, and the moon coming up, and the bathers in rose and blue and lilac, and the esplanade like a walking garden of hats and parasols. It is too beautiful to be true and I am the luckiest *blessé* in Europe.

Pete's wound is as large as your hand and still causing him pain, but he is so happy I'm here. My wound is

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as large as your other hand and my heel is in a bandage, but I am as happy as Pete. Each morning we are ordered to expose our wounds (they are really horrid) to Apollo's golden eye. We do so and drink white port. When the sun is gone from our window the HEAD NURSE comes in and wraps us up in oceans of cotton wool and we remain quiet for the rest of the day. N. and F. and C. come in and leave us like two old veterans in a fruit and flower shop. To-night at my dinner hour, F.'s Jeanne appeared, bringing a marvelous fish marvelously cooked in herbs and butter. We have wine and jam and cheese in our wardrobe. The hospital food is very good. But the window! A poem of sea and sky. I look up from my paper — the moon is over the villa and the waves are coming in like rollicking silver kittens. Chérie, I'm tired or I would not send you these empty pages.

Forever,

E.

AN AMERICAN POILU

September 2, 1918.

Hospital, Dinard.

Chérie —

The air to-day is crystal. As I look out from my pillows across the empty beach to the white hotel and the villas and the green gardens and trees and pale sky and few clouds, I seem to be looking at a miraculous landscape preserved under glass. It is so still — so clear — so impersonal. September is the secret, I fancy. The light in her eyes is other than that of August's. I think September originally hailed from Doric countries — there's a sense of Greek marbles in her luminosity — something of the arms of Venus and morn-dew on the laurel and myrtle. September is a serene arch through which Summer passes, saying good-by. The air is hushed to catch the word — even the sea is still.

However, all this is not what I was going to say. Let me tell you some-

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thing that will make you feel uncomfortable (for a second, because it's all over now as you read). The Head Nurse began this morning to "pull my leg" under the conviction that by doing so daily, she will help me to regain that extreme suppleness (in my wounded limb) so greatly admired once by my dancing partners. As you very well know, my leg has been pulled many times, but, God knows, I was never so conscious of the act as I was this morning. It is terrible and the nurse is a heartless minx.

Slowly she bends it back, slowly she straightens it out while I grind my teeth and sweat. Pete, sitting with his wound in the morning sunshine, looked as though he wanted to stick a long knife into the nurse's back as she proceeded to torture me. The doctor looked at my wound before the pulling began and said it was "doing" beautifully. To me it has the air of a very sick oyster. However, the doctor has a professional eye and I believe he is informed.

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While I was still limp *avec douleur* and the nurse was walking out of the room with Pete's invisible knife sticking in her back and an air of having done something agreeable, Mrs. P. and her lovely sister came in, bringing us illustrated papers, smiles, books and a heavenly odor. They are the only angels, so far, who have "caught on" to our literary "tastes," God bless 'em (not the tastes but the ladies). Four volumes — "La Vie Litteraire" of Anatole France, and a "Student at Arms" by Donald Hankey.

Mrs. P. spoke of Hankey as though she had fed him from her breast, but I know she has never seen him. But such is the power of a man in his book. Turning his pages I immediately had a feeling of something like love for Hankey myself. I hope acquaintance won't change the feeling. I wonder how Hankey liked Anatole France? (Hankey is dead somewhere in Flanders.) No matter, they are together, in print, on my table, along with my pipe, the manu-

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script of "Dear Emily" and a cablegram from H. The latter came this early morning and brought as much pleasure as the nurse brought pain — and that's saying a good deal. However, the pain is gone and the cablegram is still on my table.

Chérie, I'm not for the moment a serene arch through which to pass, but like Summer, I must say good-by.

E.

September 3d, 1918.

Hospital 54, Dinard.

Chérie —

Yesterday I heard all day a sharp clipping sound in the little parklike garden under our sea window. Pete told me a man was cutting the hedge. To-day he is burning his trimmings — the air is fragrant with the odor — it mingles with Neptune's salty breath. I close my eyes and dream of pirates' bonfires by autumnal shores of perilous seas. I dream of October gardens — Summer burning her old clothes. Sum-

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mer? How quickly she has played her part this year. I've hardly been aware of her. A man without a garden knows nothing about summer. Now and again I've been conscious of flowers — those of my first battlefield, I shall never forget — but flowers as a sign of long summer months — of thin coats and straw hats — of picnics and breathless nights — of all that I've had no hint. A little while ago I was writing of the icicle fringe on the "green chalet" and then of the coming of spring to Roville — then June and the battlefield flowers, and now the peppery smell of burning leaves is in the air.

It would be a pity to live intensely all one's life, the beauty of the "game" would go by quite unnoticed. It was always November at Croisset, when Flaubert lived there. He couldn't see the sunset for Emma — she kept his eyes riveted to his pen. One must be a lazybones to do justice to a cloud, a wave or a bouquet of flowers. I saw

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a bouquet of flowers lately — in fact I lived with it for a week (a *blessé* could easily be mistaken for a lazybones). An old lady brought it to Pete; she had gathered it from her ancient garden and she had arranged it. Hawaiian fans and Chinese lanterns were pale beside it — orange-vermilion, blue — pied, striped, freckled — it was gorgeous as an embroidery. Its double blazed in our mirror. There were stiff rosettes from an Arabian dancer's headdress — there were coral things that hung aside like long earrings — there were full-blown circles turning their backs — there were little moons painted by Veronese — and bells of wine color and blood color; there were feathery things that trailed and escaped — and clusters of little butterfly wings crowded together — and spotted tongues and shining swords and enamel paints and emerald sprays — and over it all an atmosphere of long ago — of I don't know what — quiet old parlors and lovely old gardens. It lived with

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us for a week and we were sorry when the Head Nurse said it was dead.

Do you find my letter strange? It has been interrupted several times. 1st. By a charming young lady come to see Pete. She was blondly beautiful. Her husband has been a prisoner in Germany since three years. Her little boy has never seen his father (I often think war is harder on the women than on the men). 2nd. A yellow canoe appeared on the high tide — it was charming — we watched it for a long time. 3rd. Jeanne came in bringing a family ice-cream freezer for our dinner — the first ice cream I've had this summer. 4th. *La soupe*. 5th. *Le communiqué* — the English are working well. And now it is twilight — an inter-tissue of gold and pearls. I'm always thoughtless after dinner — I smoke my pipe — through its gray wreaths I smile at you and say good-by.

E.

This isn't a letter. I send you a bouquet.

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September 5th, 1918.

Hôpital 54, Dinard.

Dear Mother —

Don't expect this is to be an agreeable or an interesting or a hopeful letter. It cannot be. The rolling splendors of the world are, for me at this moment, growing black. Why? Give ear — I'm smoking my last pipe. No more tobacco. The rings vanishing over my nose are melancholy as funeral bells. My last pipe! What shall I do this evening after *la soupe*? Heaven help me. I've warned Pete to be prepared for a violent change in my deportment. I shall, being smokeless, become, I'm sure, both painfully irritating and sickeningly pessimistic. It's no joke. I'm irritated now, realizing my last pipe is between my lips. Since the dawn cracked a hired man has scoured Dinard trying to buy tobacco at any price in any form; not a leaf or the dust of one was to be found. Hearing this deadly report, I tearfully inquired if I might be given an old willow

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chair or a dose of ether. They laughed at me. To-night will be awful. I pity the gentle Captain and the Head Nurse. However for the moment I'm smoking, and while this fleeting paradise is under my nose I do wrong to groan over torments to come. Perhaps — straw to a sinking sailor — perhaps N. will come in later bringing a five-cent package. Why did I ever offer a comrade a cigarette? I recall days, weeks even, when I was positively burdened with tobacco. This moment sees me reduced to a burning thimbleful. The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away!

Well, what is there to write about? My window? It is a holiday picture — muslin and silk on the shingle — kids building castles in the sand — bathers playing leapfrog — gentlemen in white duck sitting on camp stools, *smoking*. The tide is out — he rolls on Nahant beach — the villas opposite have let down their awnings; they look like quiet ladies reading novels.

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On the hotel balcony a group of American soldiers sit with their feet on the railing. They are smoking. If you wish to think I refer to their feet as smoking you may. Feet — mine are gradually becoming normal. The week of marching before the attack of July 21st was a tragedy for my feet. My toes all but didn't drop off. As far as their smell pleased me, I should have been only too glad if they had.

Mon Dieu, Mother, my pipe is burning low. In a very few minutes it will be finished and with it my hopes and my happiness. Pete looks suddenly frightened. Already I've prepared a nasty remark for the Head Nurse when she shall stick her disgusting face into the room. What a hateful sight this window presents — stupid monkeys in muslin and duck. These children should be beaten for screaming so near a hospital. Horrors ! my pipe is dead —

E.

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P.S. Saved — no joking — N. has come in and brought four dollars' worth of English tobacco. She also brought a large box of sardines and a most charming gentleman — a painter — Mr. Clifford Grayson. Ask M. if she knows his work. Saved — saved — my pipe is blazing like a foundry chimney.

E.

September 7th, 1918.

Hôpital 54, Dinard.

Chérie —

My letter of yesterday morning promised another — it was to be written after breakfast. It wasn't — I've forgotten what kept me out of the ink-pot. No matter — I remember the subject — something about gods and prayers on the battlefield. Since being a *blessé*, spending these long days in bed, I've thought about God and prayers and wondered why, when the horrors of a modern battlefield were around me as thick as August flies, the thought

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to pray never crossed my mind. Somehow, I find this strange. The night of June 11th, when I rolled up in a blanket beside Pete in the bombarded ravine, would have been a natural moment to pray — instinctively. Comfort — either physical or spiritual was at a premium. I could so easily have made a good prayer that night — but I didn't think about it. Strange. Same omission July 20th. That awful night before the attack — on the battlefield before Soissons — exhausted and depressed — I never thought of praying for whatever prayer might give me. I wonder where a man must be in order to pray — like a savage I was going to say — to pray blindly, recklessly almost — in his need for comfort. I certainly needed comfort that night, and wouldn't have been at all fussy from whence it came. It rained — our ditch was muddy — we were hungry — exhausted — struck — why didn't I pray? I would have had I thought to — why didn't I think of it? I slept a

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little — at one o'clock we were told to cock our guns and fall into line.

The atmosphere of that hour was criminal. A village burning away off put a baleful flicker in the landscape. The dead, friendly and otherwise, huddled under foot — odd shadows on which we were careful not to step. Now and again a rocket burst overhead — delicate white flowers floating dreamily. The enemy was looking for us. I had an especial horror of these rockets.

“Well, old man, how do you feel?” I said to the fellow beside me — François Le Breton. “My star,” he answered, “I trust in my star.” And there is the nearest approach to a religious sentiment that I’ve ever heard from a soldier. Soldiers are fatalists. Chance is the fighting man’s God. Take your chance and advance (as though Chance were an ivory image carried in one’s pocket) is an honest parting message to a soldier. “Good chance” they call one to another.

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During the infernal barrage — day-break, July 21st — I was vividly conscious of Chance — my Chance — my protector — scurrying around me. It was something with abnormally long legs — it was male — so much is certain; vaguely I think it was more like a devil in appearance than an angel, but it may have been a man-angel whose face was tortured by excitement. Anyway, I knew it for Chance and knew also it was working to save me. I did nothing — I left it all to Chance. In fact there was absolutely nothing for me to do — our orders being to remain in the rut until word came to advance. Chance worked like a Trojan — like a mad Trojan; I watched him, slightly amused — he reminded me of a jumping-jack, his legs were so long and active. The thicker the high explosives the calmer I became. I examined the pebbles in the rut — I quietly bandaged the wounds of a man who fell nearly on top of me. Chance was straddling

around — this side, that side, over me — like a maniac.

“I’m still alive, I’m still alive,” I said aloud, perhaps to tell Chance not to lose heart; perhaps I fancied he might miss sight of me — the air was so murky with powder and flying dirt — and mistake another soldier for me. The tanks went by — I saw them in the wild light of a terrible explosion. My dear Lieutenant called “*En avant*” — his voice was raw. I was glad to be on my feet — I was tremendously alive — it was almost sexual.

Then in the demoniacal turnip field I saw the God of War — and I saw Death; he was a crumpled thing dressed in blue and green and khaki — a mist was on his back. Chance, I distinctly realized, had left me. His parting words were “Now, E., you must scuffle for yourself.” I didn’t see him again until two hours later. After I received my bullet and was told to get to the rear if possible, I met him again. He was

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before me, looking over his shoulder — kept zigzagging the path — now to the right, now to the left — as the “marmites” fell now here, now there. My faith in him during that return was complete. He was my God. I walked tranquilly behind him — and he gently disappeared as I neared the Poste de Secours. Other gods — Fatigue and Pain — took me in charge — relatively merry gods. Chérie, you think this all a fancy — a joke? Its every word is out of my deepest consciousness.

Devotedly,
E.

Dinard.

September 22, 1918.

Dear Mother —

My *décor* is at this minute worth mentioning. It is nine o'clock and I'm in bed, of course. Pete is also in bed with a newspaper. We have just come in from a day at the Villa. The *décor* is outside the window but the room

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is brilliant with it — it is a kind of glad fury. The tide, the moon — both are full. The highest tide of the year, I've been told. Riding home by the *digue* we saw the crowd watching, in the moonlight roar; we hear the cries of admiration as roller after roller explodes on the sea wall. In the brocaded blueness I see the clouds of spray like an apple orchard in bloom. I think of the lines of a poem I read recently (in French but I write in U. S.).

“The sea is more beautiful
Than the cathedrals.”

The other day a poilu asked me in all seriousness if my father had spoken United States. I think he thought he may have used the lovely language of Minnehaha. I answered without a smile that my father was born in England, but my mother was a Redskin whom my father met while trapping bears. He bored me by beginning to talk of the “Last of the Mohicans.”

AN AMERICAN POILU

Monday Morning — *Dear Mother* —

I don't know whether it was the sea or my pedigree that knocked the pen out of my hand last night. Anyway, the pen fell from my hand and I dropped asleep. Did I dream of Diane and Neptune? I did not. Well, the tide is at flood again and the sun is playing the moon's part — golden explosions over the sea wall. I'm cold. My feet are frozen. You see I am exposing my wound. It's a tiny little red eye now which should heal over in no time but, being placed as it is directly in the bend of the knee, we don't know when it will heal. Its tardiness irritates me.

Pete will go before I do and I shall be miserable again. I fancy they will move me out of this beautiful chamber. And for how long I shall be swinging around on these crutches I don't know. I'm getting quite expert with them now and appear at teas and dinners like any other well-meaning quadruped. A

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very stiff leg and a handsome pair of crutches help to "make" a drawing room. The crutches love "to go."

Devotedly,
E.

Dinard.

September 26, 1918.

Chérie —

In order to make room for our recent high tides the Nile-green cabins were dragged beyond the shingle. This was three or four days ago and I notice they have not been put back again. This is a real sign that summer is over. The colored gayety of the beach has vanished. My window is wanting in animation. A few khaki soldiers playing baseball on the rather khaki-toned sand do nothing to enliven the scene. To be sure this noon, when the waves were breaking near the sea wall, a few pink and blue fellows went in for a swim, but I fancy they were "huskies" hardening their muscles.

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It is autumn and a little quiet and sad. I am sorry to find it gone — the summer — for all it was a wounded one. These weeks in hospital with Pete and the window have been pleasant and now winter yawns in our faces a trifle discouragingly. How often our wounds are blessings camouflaged. Winter — my winter — is hidden in mystery. But I was never frightened seriously by mystery. I must go where I am sent and do my best until the game is over.

To-day a letter informs us that the *3ème Cie.* has, as far as we knew it, ceased to exist; most of my comrades are dead or wounded and the officers changed for the same reasons. Pete's wound has proved too slow in healing, and his company has been taken by another Captain. Of course this does not mean that we may not be just as happy and fortunate as we were last winter. The letter told of another attack in the vicinity of Noyon in which the

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gas had proved extremely mortal for our beloved 412^{ème}. I think I prefer to be shot rather than gassed. Many of the men were horribly burned — in the face, under the arms, and between the legs. Some were blinded. I see that Germany is protesting against the use of gas through the Swiss Red Cross. The hypocritical beast! She was the first to use it.

If I am killed before the war ends I hope you will send me a copy of the peace contract. In doubt where, send two copies — one to heaven.

By the way, I was once in Heaven. I spent an afternoon there. At Beauvais, on the operating table, naked as when I was born, I slipped off the edge of the world and when, some hours later, I returned, I felt that I had been in Heaven. Divine awakening — no memory record — but the health and serenity of young temples around me. Surely I had been somewhere that had done me good.

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This is rare, I have been told by nurses and doctors, and my orderly experience at Neuilly tells me also. Most men return from anæsthesia in agony — struggles — nausea — cries — terrors, etc. I came out with the ease with which I imagine a white flower blooms. I felt like new milk. “*Monsieur était doux comme un enfant,*” said the nurse, when I asked if I had behaved badly while unconscious. The poor chap in the bed beside me at Laval suffered unspeakable horror during his operation and before regaining consciousness. A whiff of ether made him shudder. I was in Heaven, consequently I love the smell of ether.

We talked of this the other day *chez* Madame B. She is interested in theories of reincarnation and she assured me that I had been on the astral plane for an afternoon. I was quite ready to believe her. Monsieur B. made a pompous bow and said, “*Mes félicitations, mon cher ami.*” Well, after all, one is helpless under ether. You remember

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I paid for that outing some hours later
— and wept — and was rebuked.

Devotedly,
E.

Dinard.

September 27, 1918.

Chérie —

Yesterday the *déclenchement d'une offensive* in Champagne — twelve thousand prisoners the first day means a brilliant start. To-night the news that Bulgaria has asked for an armistice. These are items of good news as I write but old-fashioned when you read them. What a powerful word *déclenchement*! As I recall our attack of July 21st, I feel the force of the word.

The awful silence in which we crept to our position of attack — the ugly waiting for the expectant moment — the demoniacal outcry when the bolt was drawn and the hell was upon us. If the city of New York should topple in the sky and fall to the ground, the crash

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would be like a whisper to the racket of that dawn. I wonder that the entire regiment didn't perish from the mere sound alone. Its fury turned Jehovah's wrath into a shepherd's piping, and ten thousand Wagners, "ragging" ten thousand orchestras, into the murmur of a parlor seashell. But what's the use — I only amuse myself — you can't hear it. I've really forgotten myself how monstrous it was. Memory cannot hold so much noise.

The silence of the moon is incomparable — to-night.

I had just finished my supper this evening when Mrs. C. T. came in to "cheer me up." She is working at the Y. M. C. A. (called simply the Y.) and talks a blue streak about "our dear boys." She vows she loves each one and finds each one singularly charming. "They are so clean, Mr. H. — and so witty." The conversation dropped elegantly into vermin. We laughed about lice. The war has ennobled the beastie.

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One may discuss him at tea parties. He "stalks" in between the empresses of Germany and Russia. Like my comrades I've always called him "toto." A charming pet name. One might in ecstasy call his sweetheart "Toto." I believe some "ones" do. Mrs. C. T. informs me that "our dear boys" call him "Cootie." The English soldiers call him (but they are always plural) "seam squirrels." I wonder what his name is in the German trenches and the Austrian? And what does the Italian soldier say when he scratches himself, etc. etc., even to Mesopotamia? Strangely enough I've never yet been intimate with a "Toto", but I've seen my comrades chasing him with a sort of Daniel Boone look in their eyes. "Seam squirrels" is funny, isn't it?

Good night,
E.

AN AMERICAN POILU

Sunday Twilight, Dinard.

September 29, 1918.

Dear Mother —

As you read "Sunday Twilight" do you see an azure sky brocaded with rosy and goldeny clouds (as though the seraphs had hung out their ball dresses for an airing)? Do you see the shadowy villas going to sleep under the September trees? Do you hear the tide coming in like a tired and complaining child?

How the days have dwindled; no more long evening poems after dinner — and the sun is hardly up to light our breakfast. Our charming summer has disappeared and autumn has crept in through the fence, staining the woodbine red. Our charming summer? Does that sound selfish and forgetful? Perhaps — still I have seen Her in the gardens, on the sands, in the sky, bathing in the sea (you know how She does get about!) and She has been so pretty. Once look-

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ing into Her eyes the slaughter fields seem far away, and one forgets his narrow escape.

I remember my first day here at Dinard, looking at the beach brilliant with holiday and sunshine, and I thought, is it possible that only a day's journey from here men are facing all the horrors of battle? I couldn't believe it. A month has only strengthened my unbelief, and yet each day has been bloody somewhere in France. To-night — in this blue stillness (the seraphs are dragging in their traps) — can it be possible that that hell is going on — that hell I know? How dare I say "charming summer"! However, against the black curtain of war I have seen Her white throat and blond curls — She has been here — She has gone — and Her loveliness has touched me. I came so near losing Her — so near — A soldier is indeed like a miser who counts lasciviously each golden day that falls into his hand. He knows their preciousness

— he is afraid to let one slide — it may so easily be his last.

I fancy this is the reason that soldiers are, as a rule, more reckless than post-men or barbers. To follow the heel of Death is to be sensitive to the clouds that gather round the setting sun. I have told you how we picked the flowers while crouching in the wheat, waiting for orders to advance. *I* knew I was picking mere flowers, but most of my comrades were picking whatever they had known of charm and pleasure and home. Had pictures been taken of their brains they would have shown them as dreamy poets rather than soldiers. I think all soldiers are just what might be called poets — which accounts for their divine gentleness, tenderness, bravery. The old stuff about drums and bluster is nonsense pulled off in musical comedy. I have seen, resting by the roadside, my whole company grown sweet as young girls. On the battlefield they smiled at one another like sisters.

AN AMERICAN POILU

Strange, isn't it? But what was I saying about Summer? Oh! She has gone. She was charming. I hope to meet Her next year —

Devotedly,
E.

Dinard.

October 2, 1918.

Chérie —

How do you find time to read all my letters? It seems to me you must be dizzy picking them out of the vestibule. I am becoming notorious and nothing can stop me, I fear, but death or a *crise d'encre*. But it chances to be my "soul's pleasure" to write — to write letters. A solid form of literature — a book for example — would bore me, but letters are so easy, so elastic, so ready to turn in my hand. Upside down, head over heels, any old way. And a letter has always its own excuse — it's only a letter. No one really egotistical would subject his more or

AN AMERICAN POILU

less precious thoughts to so dangerous a life as that of a letter.

Between you and me lurk ten thousand currents capable of sending this airy page to limbo. Perhaps many of my most careful scribbles have never reached you, and there's a mutual satisfaction. Yet (notice the slightly regretful "yet") — my letters are my best — my markings — my heart. I think as they do. My days and night are on these lines. Strange how we spin less than the field spider. Like cobwebs hanging between two grasses we (or they or I) need the sun to make them shine. Sunday last I said you were a golden bouquet; to-night I ask you to be my sun. If you will not be, my webs are for brooms and dustpans. My ink runs easiest toward you. In a mere kitchen glass of water they say there are waves obeying the moon. Do you agree to be my moon also?

If this pen keeps on, you will be busier than President Wilson, Clemenceau and

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Lloyd George all in a puddle. By the way, what a magnificent speech our Wilson has just made. It should be the Credo of all political bodies. He has given the keystone to modern governments. I notice that it has made very few comments in the European papers. Perhaps it is too bright a flash for the moment. Europe is so dusty. Imagine the meaninglessness of the Hermes of Praxiteles to the American Indians.

Pete has spent the day reading maps — our four walls are covered with them.

Devotedly,
E.

October 2, 1918.
Hospital, Dinard.

Dear Mother —

The last day of September we made a great effort and went to St. Malo to eat lobsters. We took N. to put a charm over our greedy excursion. N. is like you, always smiling and ready

for an outing. After half a century of them she is still "game" for another.

We lost the white *Vedetta* by a hair because the nurse was late in dressing my wound, and so we were obliged to wait on the windy jetty for half an hour for the sailing of the green. She was something like a teacup and the bay was choppy. My boarding of her was exciting — requiring the aid of three hairy old salts — to say nothing of Pete and N. Crutches were not made for seafarers.

The weeny-teeny cabin was stuffy, and although it's only a ten-minute sail from Dinard to St. Malo I did not care to think of eating lobster during the voyage. Everything bobbed except my stiff leg. Other hairy old salts helped me on to terra firma.

We walked to a quaint little café where, we had been told, the lobsters were fresh. It was rather sad — that little promenade along the sea road of St. Malo. I was one of a dozen or more

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poor *blessés* swinging on crutches. We smiled at one another as though we were bigger children playing on stilts. I rested on a bench while some Boche prisoners went by. There are many at St. Malo, working on the docks. They disgust me for all I know they are human and unhappy.

There is a huge Y. M. C. A. hut at St. Malo for the American *permissionnaires*. The crooked old streets were full of them.

Well, the lobster was delicious and I ate more than I should have eaten — that is, for bodily comfort; but, as I told N., we were out on a spiritual spree — the pursuit of a dream — which could not be curtailed by the size of my stomach.

But at last we all took my leg out from under the table and put it into an open carriage and went for a ride. The driver was young and stupid and the horse very old and quite mad — suddenly stopping and backing down

hill. It began to rain so we spent a pleasant and dangerous afternoon.

We sailed back to Dinard in another teacup and I was in bed, tired as a dog, at six o'clock. We succeeded in bringing the lobster we had eaten with us and perhaps that explains my dreams that night. They were crimson, my dreams, not with lobsters but with bloody soldiers. All my dreams (some horrors) since July 21st are of battlefields. Recently I had a letter from Lieutenant H. in which he said he had dreamed the previous night of our fighting the Boche like demons. Interesting to think of the dreams in a war hospital. Fancy the curdling nightmares of wounded men.

Yesterday we teaced at the Villa. F. had brought from Jersey a lot of English buns. Some charming American officers were there. One, a lieutenant from Philadelphia, was recovering from a wound in the wrist. He was studying theology when he entered the army and

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was married three days before he sailed for Europe. In a week he returns to his regiment. I don't know why I tell you all this. But he was such a nice fellow. I hope he will escape again and go home to his bride and his theology.

E.

October 6, 1918.

Hôpital 54, Dinard.

Dear Mother —

I've pulled out my pad and taken up my pen more from habit than from any special desire to write. Nothing very much going on outside or inside my head. The day is thin-blue, the tide is out, the window in its dullest mood. One or two or four doughboys strolling on the beach, looking doubtlessly for summer. One or two or four ladies strolling after them, looking for meat and potatoes, perhaps. Doesn't sound very gay, does it?

Pete is at the little table trying to answer a letter received last March.

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Of course I'm propped up in bed, writing words from a background of thoughtlessness. And you, Chérie, what are you doing, I wonder. I'm too lazy to reckon what o'clock it may be in M.

Well, let me tell you about the "Queen of Dinard." She is an American and is eighty-eight years old and has reigned here for half a century. She dresses in pink velvet and her bonnets resemble crowns. She dances and sings and holds her court nightly. Half the cemeteries of Europe have dined with her. She was a famous beauty in the time of Napoleon III and is still handsomer than most of Eve's daughters. I have heard of her since I first knew Paris. A week ago I was presented — or rather she was presented to me — or rather to my stiff leg.

Mrs. P. gave a large tea and I accepted an invitation. When I got into the hall and heard the buzz I said to Pete, "Perhaps I've done wrong to come on crutches to an affair of this kind."

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Mrs. P. was immediately by my side and led me to the Salon and put me down in one and my leg up in another chair. A table covered with "tea" was near at hand and the prettiest girl in the party to entertain me.

The Queen arrived — everybody got up (I was forbidden to) and she was brought to me — presented and seated in front of my leg. I was amazed by her beauty and the sweetness of her personality. She was like a flower left on a tomb. She talked melodiously while looking intensely at me, as though she would take the youth out of my face (thirty-six is young to eighty-eight). I wanted to look quite as intensely at her — to see how she had done it — but of course I couldn't. She was a miracle of camouflage. Her coffin (I mean her carriage) was announced and away she went, gentle as an old song, to a dinner party, a dance, or her own lovely funeral. Sitting in the embers of her departure I heard my crutches say, "Pussy cat,

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Pussy cat, where have you been? I've been to London to see the Queen."

Then we all went home.

E.

October 8, 1918.

Hôpital 54, Dinard.

Beloved Mother —

This is your birthday and since I awoke this early morning I've been thinking what I could send you, as a birthday gift. I want to send you something charming like a lace handkerchief or a basket of mauve sweetgrass or a bouquet. I want to send you a gift to show you I'm glad it is your birthday and that I've remembered the exact date. But we are far apart and my arm is shorter than my dreams. I can only write you a gift. I have been thinking what I could write. I have been looking about into the mirror, up at the ceiling, out of the rainy window for a lovely idea for a gift for you. Mirror, ceiling, window have nothing lovely

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enough for you. I look into my memory — there I see a Queen, a Cathedral, a wounded soldier. Yes, I say to my pen, this Queen, this Cathedral, this wounded soldier will do nicely for mother's birthday gift.

The other day a very pretty lady came to see me, who but lately had been in London helping in a hospital all summer. She had taken care of some of the wounded American soldiers. She was enthusiastic about their marvelous courage and gayety while enduring almost daily suffering. Her eyes filled with tears as she told of one case — a giant from Texas who had lost both legs and both arms. A magnificent torso and head were all the surgeons had saved. This remnant of a Texas soldier was the gayety of her ward. His drollery and jokes made the sad man who had lost his left hand laugh. Every one loved him.

A great service was to be celebrated in St. Paul's for the American dead,

and the day before the soldier from Texas told a visiting friend of his desire to attend the solemnity. The friend was only too happy to arrange it, and did.

Imagine his entrance into the crowded cathedral — a murmur at the doors — a withdrawing — a hush. No bandage or blanket could hide his disaster. He was pushed down the quivering aisle. The Queen — Queen Mary — said, “Bring him here. His place is by my side.”

In the royal company, beside the Queen, the soldier from Texas celebrated the service for the dead. Long live Mary of England!

Dear mother, this is what I found in my memory to send you for your birthday gift. I hope it will please you. I think it will. A gift is something that makes the receiver richer. A sentiment is lovely as pearls. A gift is a recognition, a tenderness, a perfume passing from one to another. This story of

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the Queen and the mutilated soldier
is just that — a gift !

Devotedly,
E.

October 16, 1918.
Hôpital 54, Dinard.

Dear Mother —

When I was helping at the American Ambulance at Neuilly I remember I never felt the slightest difficulty in regard to facing the wounds — shocking, appalling, disgusting as they so often were. I recollect watching with almost indifference the “dressings” — dressings that must have been the white heat of torture to the victims. I noted their pinched-up foreheads and wild eyes. I heard their teeth and their dry cries. I felt their grip on my arm but it seems to me now that I felt nothing — or almost nothing — of all the agony then around me. A horribly bad wound was to me at that time rather fascinating.

Since July 21st my attitude has

changed. I dislike to see a comrade's wound. To hear the cries through the walls even strangles me. At Beauvais I was suffering too keenly myself to look about at the other fellows waiting to be put on the dressing tables. I was brought in and carried out, mindful only of my own little hell in the general disaster. I never cried aloud but I clutched like a maniac at the man who held me. But at Laval, my condition having ameliorated, I was able — in fact forced — to look about when daily I was dressed in the *salle de pansement*. What I had found interesting at Neuilly as an orderly I found almost unbearable as a *blessé* at Laval. When I saw the nurse was preparing to insert a *mèche* into a comrade's side, or wherever, I had to close my eyes and think of something else until his sigh died away.

Have I never told you what a *mèche* is? It is the devil's finger: in other words it is a long narrow strip of cotton

cloth wet with acid which, with the help of pincers, the Heathen Deity (generally a smiling young girl) forces inch after inch into your wound up to the quick. It slightly reminds one of a dentist's drill on an exposed nerve but, really, the drill is nothing compared to the *mêche*. For a month I was treated to the *mêche*. Pete for a fortnight had two in his shoulder wound. The fat nice Curé who came now and again to see us at Laval told he had seen a wounded soldier with six. The Curé said the hero recovered but I think the Curé was mistaken. Three *mêches* would kill any man.

At Dinard I've been fortunate, having seen very few wounds. The nurse comes to our room to do our dressings. But yesterday I did go to the *salle de pansement* to have my scabby scar washed. The room was crowded with *blessés* waiting attention, their wounds exposed. It was most painful to see. The brutality of mangled flesh is awful.

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One little man yelled a good deal while the nurse dressed the raw place where once his big toe had been. But he was quiet when they carried him away. In the afternoon I heard him singing. His chamber is next ours. He sang like a lark all the afternoon. I heard later he was happy from having received a letter from his wife. This morning at five o'clock he was found dead in his bed.

Devotedly,
E.

October 21, 1918.
Hôpital 54, Dinard.

Chérie —

If you have a memory and are a bit of a sentimentalist you have laid my plate at your dinner table to-night and before drinking your wine thanked Chance that I'm alive. This is almost the anniversary of my death. Three months ago this date I was covered with blood and dirt and, exhausted

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as a slave, was riding with a thousand wounded comrades away from the front toward Beauvais.

I've never told you about that train journey, and I'm not going to now; it is too horrid to send in a letter. Not only was I suffering with my wound — not only was I tired to tears — but I was burning with anger — with anger toward every official I met — because every official was so damnably rude. I was shocked, pained, insulted, mad. We were treated like dogs simply because we were “common soldiers.” And I forgot and gave a “piece of my mind” and was nearly arrested, wound and all.

Three months ago to-night by a miracle I was not dead as Marley on that demoniacal beet-field near the highroad to Soissons — the highroad between Soissons and Chateau-Thierry. We will go there after the war and I will show you the hill on which I fell.

To-day the doctor examined my wound and pronounced it healed and ordered

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the cotton wool to be removed forever. I say forever, but now he wishes to watch the wound for ten days or so to see that it does not reopen. He fears it may. To-day the order for Pete's removal arrived. In two days he will leave me. We are both trying to be chic, but we are both miserable. The change for me is to be enormous. I lose everything — *C'est la guerre!* But still I remember this night might have been the anniversary of my death.

Devotedly,
E.

November 7, 1918.

Hôpital Complémentaire, No. 1, Rennes.

Chérie —

In order to get the story of my life up to date I must write a very long letter. We do not like long letters but I will try to color it so as not to seriously bore you, although the mere adventures of my recent days seem to me quite as

romantic as a novel by Walter Scott. I am certainly Fortune's darling; good luck follows me like a black demon or a white angel or a tawny Newfoundland dog. I can't escape the milk of human kindness, and why this is so remains my daily riddle. If either you or mother can guess the answer, please write it to me. But of course you can't, because you and mother are part of the enigma.

But to begin my story: that I should have been wounded so soon after the Captain and after a little time sent to him at Dinard was a miracle. Dinard — all summer and blue sea; Dinard of charming friends and books and the healing wounds. Only one fly was in our amber — the thought that in all likelihood Pete's wound would heal before mine and that he would be sent to the east, and later when mine would be healed I would be sent to the west. Of course, being soldiers, we didn't worry about this, still the prospect wasn't agreeable, — a fly in the Dinard amber.

Pete's shoulder healed first and the doctor said he was now ready to go to Rennes for massage treatment. "And Monsieur H.?" asked Pete. "Well, I think he will be ready to follow you in eight or ten days," answered the doctor. By-the-way, the doctor was the thinnest, slowest, gentlest man I've ever seen. At the head of every hospital there is an officer called "*le questionnaire*." Well, our Dinard "*questionnaire*", hearing that the Captain was to leave before the American, came to our room and told Pete he was free to remain until his friend was ready to go. Instantly, we placed an invisible crown of expensive roses on "*le questionnaire's*" head. He was a fat little man and looked charmingly droll wearing our wreath.

So Pete waited and the last raw spot of my wound covered over and the order came from Rennes and the day of our departure arrived. Our train would leave at four o'clock. We began to pack our luggage soon after breakfast.

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Of course we knew we were to be in separate hospitals in Rennes, and I had been told mine, *Le Lycée*, was a horror, but at least we were to have the pleasure of encountering the strange newness together, and no telling how much Pete would be able to assist me. A *poilu* is a *poilu* and a Captain is a Captain.

Pete bent over to put Walt Whitman into the trunk, and on straightening up he gave a cry and fell down in a heap. I ran to him, helped him on to the bed, and called the Head Nurse. The doctor came and pronounced it an acute attack of lumbago. For an hour his suffering was intense and, naturally, we knew it would be impossible for him to go to Rennes that day. "He might be confined to his bed for a week," the doctor said. "What a horrid joke," we thought, "after he had waited for me, and now after all I must go alone."

"Never," said Pete, "I leave to-morrow, lumbago or no lumbago."

We turned him on his belly and off

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and on, for the next twenty-four hours, the Head Nurse, La Comtesse de Madrid, and I massaged his back. (As a matter of fact he has since learned the attack was not lumbago but a case of exhausted nerves caused by his wound. He has had four severe operations, you know.)

The following day he insisted on getting up. We got our traps together and took the four o'clock train for Rennes. I walked like a cripple, Pete walked like a tired old man. We were obliged to change trains three times. There was no one to lend a hand. We were covered with luggage, bags and bags and coats and canes and a huge sword. However, we managed, and in a hotel near the station (a very smelly hotel) we found two good beds, got into them and slept like a couple of judges. The next day we proposed to steal for a holiday, that is, we would not appear at our hospitals until twenty-four hours later.

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Rennes is a very old town and a very dead one. It is full of weird old corners and strange towers and mysterious stairs and sloping gables. We wandered under the old arches with the centuries. We visited the park and looked into the churches. We drank port in a Rembrandt café. We lunched like lords at the only chic restaurant. We changed our hotel and took rooms with a bath. We scrubbed before going to bed and on getting up next morning.

At nine o'clock I registered at the Lycée. Pete left to find his own hospital, after talking about me to three or four officials. Some one gave me a slip of paper on which was written *Lit 106, Salle II*. I mounted to the second story and found my corner. I was thankful it was a corner. Salle II was a vast, dirty ward, containing nearly fifty unpleasant looking beds. They were covered with gorgeous, shabby quilts, red, blue, green, etc. Some of the windows were open; of that I was glad.

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The crippled poilus were sitting about, playing cards or smoking. There were negroes from far away, Italians, Russians and Chinese looking fellows from the East. I was happy to see that the occupant of the bed beside mine was a clear-eyed Breton. He began to talk with me at once and was surprised to hear I was an American.

A drawing on the dirty wall pictured a starving Kaiser. Outside the trees were yellow and sad. A very dismal "home" I thought. How should I be able to relax to the long long days there? What would the meals be like? I went down and took a look at the *salle-à-manger*; it was awful — a filthy sty. The poor poilu, I thought. From noon until four o'clock I was free to go out. I began to wonder how I could eat three meals during the afternoon. Of course there was no heat and, I learned later, no light after dark. And November days are so short and so miserable.

At noon I went out and met Pete

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and made as good a story as I could of my "home." He was distressed and began to think how he could change matters. Briefly, he saw a friend, and on entering the hospital that night, a charwoman, from whom I asked sheets, said, "You are to go to La Retraite." Well, La Retraite couldn't be worse and it might be better. I took my bag and by the light of the charwoman's candle found my way through the ghastly hallways, passed the guarded door, and following directions, presented myself at La Retraite.

A charming man, Le Père Fleury, greeted me. His bureau was warm and cosy — a little coal fire burning on the hearth. I was invited to sit down before it. We talked English. Le Père Fleury has been for years a missionary in India and speaks English very well. At present, he told me, there was no vacant chamber, but in two days he thought he might arrange me nicely.

At nine o'clock the soldier who occupied

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the room in which I was to sleep showed me to our chamber. It was a dismal stone vault containing five little wooden beds and nothing else, except the cold atmosphere of repentance. I slept well (with a nun in my head), after getting used to the rats squealing in the corner. At seven-thirty I found the weird fountain where once the nuns, now the soldiers, wash, made my toilet and followed the men in to breakfast. The breakfast was delightful. A brown, low-studded room, spotlessly clean and smelling good. The sisters served us hot coffee and honest bread. The scene was more or less touching — a hundred shadowy cripples meekly eating in the vaguely lighted apartment.

After breakfast I looked into the dim chapel; bells were tinkling, flowers, slim candles burning on the altar. I walked out into the autumn garden. A boy with a pink, simple face was helping an old wrinkled sister cut cabbages. The straight little brook was yellow with

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leaves. The trees were bare. Returning to the house, I read over the door "Refuge des Pêcheurs." A gray virgin looked down on me. Well, I thought, this is interesting, and I shuddered, thinking of my narrow escape from the Lycée.

That night I slept in the five-bedded stone vault, but the following day Le Père Fleury told me he had a chamber for me and I went to see it. The quaintest little room you can imagine, on the sun and garden-side of the convent. It contained a desk, two chairs, a romantic fireplace, a looking glass, a seductive bed with a white pillow and a red covering, a night-stand, a portrait of St. François de Sales, a lamp, a wash table with an adequate bowl and jug and (climax!) an upright piano. It was religiously clean. I was happy and took possession at once, and here I'm living.

My good luck continued; Le Père Fleury came to me and said he would like to present me to La Mère Supérieure.

He did so. She was like a little black bell with an ivory face. A thousand chains and beads hung from her waist. She was sweet as an old picture. She talked rapidly and offered me the hospitality of her convent. A sister would be happy to prepare my breakfast and — “Did I like my bread toasted?” I was enchanted. The soldier whom I had hired to do my “work” brings my breakfast each morning at eight o’clock.

Each afternoon for two hours I’m at the Lycée for treatment. I undress half a dozen times and I am given electric currents and massage and baths. I row in a fixed boat, I ride a fixed bicycle, I strap my leg into a strange looking machine, turn a wheel, and my foot does a queer little dance all by itself. Should you look into the windows while I’m doing my treatments you would certainly think me quite mad at last. Of course *I’m* allowed to stay out as long as I like. My comrades are gathered in at four o’clock. Pete and I lunch

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and dine *en ville* and have a very jolly time. So you see I shall be happy enough at Rennes, and if the papers are not joking, my leg will be cured by the time peace is proclaimed.

Victory is certainly in sight; I can almost hear her wings unfurling. Four years of war, four millions of dead only to uproot an ambitious family! Peace — it sounds almost like a joke. And the dead around Verdun, and the ruins of northern France! How preposterous it all is — even Peace. And the thousands of cripples here in Rennes — how do they pronounce the word “Peace”? Heroically, I fancy. (In my little way I’m proud of my stiff knee.) Yesterday I was shown a vast asylum containing the insane victims of the war. This peace will hardly change their condition. Still I shall put vine leaves in my hair when the proclamation rushes through the streets.

Devotedly,
E.

AN AMERICAN POILU

November 13, 1918.

Hôpital 1, Rennes.

Chérie —

Well, I suppose you got the news quite as soon as we did, and hung out your flag and blew your horn and danced and drank wine. Germany tumbled apart and Mangin marched into Strassbourg. By the way, Mangin was my General the 21st of July, 1918. I wish I were with his soldiers now, quietly advancing into the great page of history. I enjoyed being a poilu and I'm sure the hereafter of my life will never be quite as satisfactory as this finishing war episode.

I recall a poem by De Heredia in which an aging man laments he did not die a young soldier in battle. I am that aging man. This is extremely selfish of me, isn't it? And I realize the enormous advantages of being "spared" — still, the roly-poly years say very little to me.

Perhaps I'm a little pessimistic this

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morning, and my excuse is the troublesome fact that my wound has reopened and I'm obliged to wear a *pansement* again. As you know, the wound is directly behind my knee and naturally is agitated by every step I take, every bend of the knee. The new skin over the wound is ever so delicate and two days ago it broke. Last night it looked very ugly, and this morning the good sister came in and bandaged it. This afternoon I must see the doctor and make arrangements to omit my treatments (the exercises) for at least a week or so. This is very tiresome, especially so if I'm forced to leave this tranquil Refuge des Pêcheurs. The *blessés* here are "dry", that is, healed. During the night I suffered considerably from pain in my leg. I fancy it will never be as capable as its neighbor. I shall go with a slight limp. But all this is of no importance. Let me tell you of the celebration here.

Naturally we rather expected the

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armistice would be signed, still we were dazed when the news arrived. Pierre and I were ordering luncheon in a little family café when the steeples began to sing and an excitement went up the street. The door burst open and in came a pretty little *ouvrière*, crying, "*C'est fini — c'est fini; la guerre est fini — c'est la paix.*" She made me realize what had happened — She was Victory in a pink sweater and a little black hat. The sound of her "*C'est la paix*" and the increasing clamor of the bells touched me deeply. I had visions of the dead armies contented at last and falling asleep — and my tears began to drop into my plate (we had ordered stewed kidneys).

Out in the street we found the old city a garden of flags — red and white and blue floated from every window and balcony. The sun came out as though in June and I saw the moon looking down. The crowd and its joyful noise augmented at each corner. The *place* was

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crammed to hear the Mayor's speech. The *blessés* kissed each other and legless heroes danced together. Cheers for the "doughboys" when one appeared. Venus took them from the arms of Bacchus.

In the evening we had colored lanterns and fireworks and music. *C'est la Victoire* — and every one smiled and offered a drink.

This letter must stop without being finished — I've no more time.

Devotedly,
E.

November 18, 1918.

Hôpital 1, Rennes.

Dear Mother —

Yesterday of course we had to go to church to sing the *Te Deum* and celebrate the Victory. I fancy you did the same in M. I hope your weather was as fine as ours — a winter day of sun and crystal.

The church was packed; however, arriving in good season, we got seats

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well toward the front, with every sort and condition of man — as a church should be. I noticed many American soldiers. Before the service began a passage was made in the crowd and fifty or more splendid old veterans of the War of 1870 marched gently toward the gorgeous altar, carrying their rich and memorable banners. The organ sent a spider chasing up my backbone, and from a dimness emerged an embroidered procession holding sparkling crosses and lit candles.

We stood on tiptoe to see the approaching Cardinal in a sea of scarlet draperies under a satin and fringed roof. He took his white throne as any king, and then the complicated service began. But I've neither wits nor memory enough to describe it. There was a great deal of solemn walking about and putting on and off of little caps and chanting and bowing and kissing of hands, the organ every so often chasing the spiders up my back. After a time the sleepy Cardinal left

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his throne and, preceded and followed by dressy assistants, he paraded to the pulpit and made the most lamentable speech ever made in any temple, Christian or pagan. The Captain said it was shameful, and I said it was criminal. On the greatest day of the history of the modern world, on the day of victory after a four years' war, before a vast audience the least of which had borne his fagot of suffering, the crippled soldiers, the forlorn mothers, the tragic fathers — this poor old Cardinal of Rennes had nothing to say of beauty, of consolation, of spiritual import. He talked exactly as a cabman or a bartender would talk about the Boche and the end of the war. He was a shocking Cardinal.

But the organ was victorious and the long flags hanging from the painted arches. The vast audience was victorious, also — silent and in mourning for the most part — still, emanating the joy and pride victorious. And the

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Cardinal was victorious — quite so — but he should have been celebrating in a rusty old stove-pipe hat, on the box of a shabby old cab. I hope the Cardinal in Notre Dame was more becoming to his place. I fancy he was.

Victorious — I think it very hard to be victorious — victorious with beauty. Defeat is easier; one puts on black and goes softly and is more or less dignified. Victorious—one is tempted to get drunk, to be vulgar and cruel. Listen to what Walt Whitman wrote after the victory of our Civil War, and behold the ideal.

“Reconciliation, Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost,
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly softly wash again, and ever again, this soiled world;
For my enemy is dead, a man as divine as myself is dead,

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I look where he lies white-faced and still
in the coffin — I draw near,
Bend down and touch lightly with my
lips the white face in the coffin.”

Devotedly,

E.

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